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THE GRAY SCALP:

OR,

THE BLACKFOOT BRAVE.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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THE GRAY SCALP.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

"HURRAH for Oregon! says I. That's the place for Denny, and mesilf is the boy who is bound to have a good shlice av the fine lands, and who has a better right?"

"What's the fool talkin' about? Thar's no sech place as Oregon, greeny. That kentry thar is called Oregon, and it's an Injun name, I reckon."

"An Injun name! The ignorance av yez! It was named for Michael O'Regan, who first diskivered it, as ye might read in the histories, if ye could read at all. He was an Irishman from the county Donegal, and was me grandfather's first cousin on the mother's side. We dhropped the O' whin we kim across the say; but that don't hindher me from claimin' a shlice av the fine lands that once belonged to me grandfather's cousin."

"I don't believe a word of it, Denny Regan. Of all the liars that were ever turned loose in this yere kentry, I reckon you are about the infarnalest."

"Is it a liar ye are callin' me, Misther Pap Byers? Ye've got it to take back, or feel the edge av me knife."

"You had better shut up, both of you. Captain Benning gave orders that there should be no talkin' around the camp to-night, and he'll give you a proper good blowin' up if he ketches you at it. Here he is, by thunder!"

The first speaker was Dennis Regan, a young Irishman, who, although he had turned trapper, had not discarded his brogue with his brogans, or his natural character with his corduroys. The second was John Byers, commonly called Pap Byers, a middle-aged free trapper, of long experience on the plains and in the mountains. In person he was tall, gaunt, sinewy and solemn, while the Irishman was short and stout, with fat cheeks and a merry face. The third speaker was Sam Glass,

a hired trapper, in the employ of Mr. Robinette, the fur-trader to whose company all were attached.

Captain Benning, who came up just as Sam Glass mentioned his name, was a tall young man, well built and fine looking, with an appearance of activity, nerve and daring. He was one of the leaders of the party under Mr. Robinette, and was regarded as an excellent "partisan."

"What is the meaning of this noise?" asked the captain, frowning upon the group. "Don't you know that orders were given to keep the camp quiet to-night?"

"It was Denny Regan here," replied Pap Byers. "The durned fool was tryin' to make us believe that Oregon was diskivered by an Irishman, and named arter him."

"And this ould sinner called me a liar, capt'in dear, and that's what ye wouldn't like to be called yersilf."

"No matter who began it, or what it was about; it must be stopped. There are Indians all around us, and they may be down upon us at any moment. I have been obliged to leave my patrol to come and put a stop to your noise, and there is no telling what may happen during my absence. Hark! I believe something is already the matter with the horses."

In an instant the attitude and air of the four men were changed. With countenances expressive of anxiety, they leaned forward, listening intently to catch the slightest sound that might indicate an alarm.

"You're right thar, cap'n!" exclaimed Byers, seizing his rifle and jumping up; "the red-skins are among the hosses."

All rushed toward the camp, to give the alarm, and to search for the wily enemy; but they were too late.

The horses were already stampeded, and came bursting through the camp like an avalanche, overthrowing every thing before them. After them, with terrific yells and whoops, poured a crowd of half-naked savages, splendidly mounted, galloping like mad after the frightened herd.

Captain Benning and his companions fired at the Indians, and a few straggling shots from the camp showed that some attempt at defense was made there; but the furious rush of the animals prevented any thing like an organized resistance. It is probable that the assailants had not intended, at first, any

thing more than a stampede; but the route taken by the horses had thrown the camp into such confusion, that the massacre and plunder of the party of white men seemed to follow as a matter of course.

The voices of the leaders were heard, far above the din, directing the movements of their followers. A few of the warriors rode on after the herd, to keep the animals together and guide their course; while the others turned and dashed upon the scattered and bewildered whites, hoping to slay them before they could recover from their confusion.

But a party of more than thirty mountain men was not to be so easily discomfited. The hardy trappers and hunters, accustomed to savage combats, availing themselves of the shelter of the wagons and packs, stood gallantly on the defensive, loading and firing their rifles with a rapidity and precision that soon checked the fury of the onset. The savages, who fought at a disadvantage on horseback, were in their turn thrown into confusion and forced back.

Again the voices of the leaders rung out, and a portion of the warriors dismounted, to renew the combat on foot, while others circled around the wagons, for the purpose of driving the trappers from their defenses.

The white men were quickly outflanked, and were gradually forced back, until they were compelled to take refuge in a thicket, leaving the camp in the possession of their assailants.

Having accomplished this much, the savages, as has sometimes happened to more civilized warriors, made a poor use of their victory. Instead of pursuing their advantage, part of them fell to plundering the camp and securing the scalps of the slain.

It was at this juncture that Benning and his companions, who had been compelled to make a circuit in order to find their friends, reached the camp, and poured in a volley upon the flank of the savages. The trappers in the thicket, profiting by this diversion in their favor, rushed out, and charged boldly upon the enemy. A few volleys from their terrible rifles changed the face of affairs, and the savages were soon flying from the camp as swiftly as they had entered it. Being unable to pursue them, from lack of horses, the trappers

collected in the midst of the ruins, vowing vengeance against the midnight marauders.

Out of thirty-five men, six had been killed outright, including Mr. Robinette, the head of the expedition. It was impossible to say how many lives had been lost on the side of the Indians, as they had carried off all their dead and wounded, besides a large amount of plunder. A few of the remaining white men were wounded, but none severely.

After a hurried survey of the field, the question arose by what means the savages had been enabled to creep upon the camp without being observed. Angry recriminations ensued, and hard words seemed likely to lead to hard blows.

"Perhaps you can tell us who was at fault, Captain Benning?" said Mr. Laurie, the principal agent of Mr. Robinette. "You should know, if any man knows."

"What good will it do to argue that matter now?" tartly replied Benning. "Somebody was careless, of course, and perhaps I might put my finger on the man; but of what use would that be now? The mischief has been done, and no one knows the extent of it yet. Has anybody seen Miss Flora?"

The faces of all changed, and greater consternation than they had yet shown was now visible among the rough trappers.

Flora Robinette was the only child of her father, a beautiful dark-haired and dark-eyed girl of nineteen. Since the death of her mother, the trader had been so strongly attached to her, that it had seemed almost impossible for him to separate himself from her. As it was part of the object of this expedition to establish a post west of the Rocky Mountains, at which he expected to spend the greater part of his time, he had at last yielded to her entreaties, and permitted her to accompany him and share his home in the wilds. He believed that his party was strong enough to furnish a safe escort, and that she could be in no danger when the post was established. Her only hardships, as he supposed, would be such as would result from traveling over the plains, and from deprivation of the comforts and luxuries of civilization; but these she had professed herself able and willing to endure.

She had endured them, so far, without grumbling, and with

and apparent cheerfulness. She had manifested, also, a spirit of daring and love of adventure, together with a real delight in the fresh air and free life of the plains, that had charmed the rough men into whose company she was thrown, and rendered her the idol of them all. It was no wonder that their cheeks blanched when they were asked if they had seen her.

No one *had* seen Flora Robinette since the commencement of the fray. At the usual hour she had retired to the wagon in which she slept, and was supposed to have been there when the horses were stampeded and broke through the camp; but an examination showed that the wagon was empty.

On the ground, near the wagon, lay the body of her father, his head, from which the gray hair on the top had been stripped, surrounded by a pool of his own blood; but no trace of Flora could be found. A careful search was made by the disheartened trappers; but it disclosed nothing. They could only suppose that she had been awakened by the tumult, had looked out of the wagon, and had thus been espied by the Indians, who would lose no time in taking possession of such a prize. It was certain that she had disappeared, leaving no trace.

When the fruitless search was ended, a great change had come over George Benning. He stood like a statue, silent and motionless, and one would have thought, from the expression of his countenance, that every thing that was worth living for in the world had been taken from him. His demeanor was so strange, that Martin Laurie, the agent, took him aside and spoke with him.

Laurie was a Scotchman, whose age might have been anywhere between forty and forty-five. He had the sandy hair, red eyes and watery complexion peculiar to many of his race; but was not really ill-looking. He was sedate and precise, a shrewd and methodical man of business, and as such had been highly esteemed by Mr. Robinette.

"What is the matter with you, Benning?" he asked. "You act very strangely, and you look as if you had lost all the friends you had in the world. Can it be possible that the death of Mr. Robinette affects you so strongly?"

"No. He was a good man, and I respected him highly; but I have no special reason to grieve for him."

"It must be, then, that it is the loss of Miss Flora that troubles you."

"I confess it. If she had been killed, it would have been relief to know it; but she has been carried away, we know not where, and it is terrible to think of the fate that may be reserved for her."

"You seem to take it harder than any of the rest of us, although you are in no way related to her. I have noticed, during this journey, that you were much interested in Miss Flora, and I intended to tell you, as I now must, that it was her father's wish that she should become my wife."

"Indeed! Was she aware of it?"

"I don't know that she was. She was an only child, as you know, and Mr. Robinette was possessed of considerable property. It was his desire that she should marry a careful and prudent man of business, such as he considered me to be, who would take care that her means were not wasted."

"Be that as it may, Mr. Laurie—and I do not mean to dispute your word—it is useless to say any more about it now. She is gone, and it is doubtful if either of us will be permitted to see her again in this world. There is a chance, however, that she may still be living. I mean to search for her, and shall never abandon the search while life is left to me. I will not hinder you, of course, from devoting yourself to the same object, if you wish to do so."

"Now that Mr. Robinette is dead, it is my duty, under his instructions, to take this party on to the rendezvous west of the mountains, and follow the plan that he had formed for this season's work. If I can do any thing to help you, I will gladly do it."

"I only ask for three men."

"You may take any three who are willing to follow you. If you succeed, I suppose you will join us at the rendezvous."

"I hardly dare to hope for success. I can only say that I will do my best."

When Laurie and Benning returned to the trappers, they found them inquiring what Indians they were that had made the attack.

"They were Blackfeet, I suppose," said Benning. "How can there be any doubt about it?"

"Easy enough, car'n," replied Byers. "Do Blackfeet wear Crow blankets and moccasins?"

"No."

"We have found a Crow blanket and a Crow moccasin on this yere ground, and that settles the p'int, I reckon."

"But the Crows are the friends of the white men, and never attack them."

"Wal—I ain't so sartin of that as you seem to be. I know what they steal white men's hosses, and thar's no end to an Injun's devilment, nohow."

Some of the party were of the opinion that the assailants had been Blackfeet; but the majority sided with Byers, convinced by the Crow blanket and moccasin.

The next morning, after the bodies of the dead had been buried, Laurie and his party pushed on with the train toward the west, and Benning set off on the trail of the midnight assailants, accompanied by Pap Byers, Sam Glass and Dennis Regan. They were on foot, as no horses had been left except such as were absolutely necessary for the train; but they hoped soon to be able to secure a remount.

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CHAPTER II.

A PRAIRIE ENCOUNTER.

THE prairie was limitless. As far as the eye could see, and as much further as fancy cared to picture, it spread out like an ocean, endless and eternal. In wave upon wave of many-colored luxuriance, it rolled onward, until all color melted into the purplish hue of the horizon. There was, it is true, a thin line of low cottonwoods, marking the course of some little creek; but that might have been a mere coral reef in the ocean, or a swath of drifting seaweed. There were, also two small islands of trees in the distance; but islands are necessary to prove the existence of ocean. Far away to the westward could be dimly descried the shadowy outlines of lofty mountains; but their snowy peaks, resting among the clouds, could

not be distinguished from the clouds, and fancy could easily suppose that the prairie rolled under and beyond them, instead of bathing their rough feet in its flowery waves. As well as vision could decide, the prairie was a limitless ocean.

Only a speck in this vast ocean was the figure of a man on horseback, riding toward the west. He rode slowly, almost listlessly, seeming absorbed in the beauty of the variegated landscape, given up to the sweet influences of the exhilarating and odorous atmosphere.

A fine specimen of a man was this rider, whose age might have been a few years on the sunny side of thirty. He was fully six feet in height, well formed and athletic, with features that a woman would call handsome, in spite of his bronzed skin. His gray eyes were keen and restless; his chestnut hair, worn long, after the fashion of the Indians and trappers, flowed down upon his shoulders in wavy masses; his mouth was well cut, shaded by a silky mustache; and his beard, long and full, had the same rich color as his hair. His hunting-shirt and leggings were of the finest dressed deer-skin, and were richly and tastefully ornamented. His moccasins, also, showed the patient labor of some Indian woman, and must have cost the wearer a good quantity of trinkets or of scarlet cloth, if, indeed, they had not been a love-gift. His pipe-holder must surely have been a *gagè d'amour*; for it was a triumph of Indian workmanship, such as the squaws of the plains were not in the habit of selling. A double-barreled rifle, short, heavy, and richly finished, was his principal weapon, and rested across his right leg and the pommel of his saddle. A bright and keen-edged hatchet, or small ax, was stuck in his belt, flanked by a hunting-knife in an embroidered sheath. From his appearance, he might have been an independent trapper; but he carried no traps or sack of "possibles," and had no animal except the fine jet-black horse which he bestrode.

"Nearly noon," he soliloquized, looking up at the sun. "If I do not strike the trail of old Robinette's party before long, I shall conclude that they are behind me, and it will be necessary to wait for them. I had better join them, I suppose, as I want an outfit for the coming season, and I am curious to see whether his daughter is as beautiful as she has been represented to be. As if that was a matter that concerned me at

all! It is possible that I might find some woman who could persuade me to quit this wild life; but it lacks a great deal of being probable. It is possible, though, that I may have strayed from my course, and I must consult my little true-pointer."

Stopping his horse, he drew from the bosom of his hunting-shirt a small pocket-compass, rested it in the palm of his hand, and watched its indications.

"No; I'm on the right track—no mistake about that. I must cross the trail soon, if they have got this far. Ha! what is coming yonder? A red-skin, I suppose, and one who wants my scalp. Now, Samson, who knows but we may have a little brush to stir our blood?"

The horse pricked up his ears, whinnied, and seemed to anticipate a combat as eagerly as his master.

It was a mere speck that attracted the attention of the rider; but it was a moving speck, and he could easily guess what it meant. When he caught sight of it, he might have mistaken it for a solitary buffalo; but a brief inspection showed him that its movements were not those of the buffalo. Soon something white came into view, and the rays of the sun, shining upon it, made the speck look like a moving star.

Within a short time the speck was no longer a speck, but had assumed the form and proportions of an Indian on horse-back. The white man reined in his horse, took his rifle in his right hand, and awaited the approach of the stranger.

When the Indian had come within rifle-shot, the white man judged it best to signal him and ascertain his intentions. Accordingly, he raised his right hand, with the palm in front, and pushed it back and forth a few times. This was a signal to halt; but the savage, after shaking his head furiously, paid no further attention to it, but put his horse to full speed, and commenced to circle around his foe.

Mounted on a jet-black horse, the exact image of that which carried the white man, he presented a fine appearance as he galloped swiftly over the plain. He was nearly naked, his blanket being under him, and his skin shone as if it had been freshly oiled. With fine features, eyes as fierce and keen as lightning, and supple and sinewy limbs, every motion showing the play of his muscles, he presented an excellent object for the study of the painter or the sculptor. His scalp-lock,

adorned with feathers, showed that he held a high rank as a brave. In his right hand he carried a gun, a bow and a quiver of arrows were slung at his back, and an Indian battle-ax hung at his left side. On his left arm he carried a shield, round and white, which was dazzling to the beholder when the rays of the sun were reflected from it.

"That red-skin don't want to talk," muttered the white man. "He is keen for fight, and won't be satisfied until he gets his fill. Well, I think I can accommodate him."

As the Indian circled over the prairie, the white man, with his rifle at his shoulder, kept turning, so as continually to face his antagonist. His horse, obedient to the slightest pressure of his knee, turned where he stood, as if he comprehended, as well as his master, the best position for defense.

It was the object of the Indian to draw the fire of the white man; but he soon perceived that his foe was too wary for him, and he changed his tactics. Slinging his gun, he took his bow and some arrows from his shoulder. He then fastened one foot in his wooden stirrup, threw his body over on the right side of the horse, and again commenced to ride around the white man, drawing nearer at every circle, until he was within easy bow-shot, when he began to discharge his arrows at his antagonist.

This position of affairs soon became unpleasant to the white man, as the arrows flew uncomfortably near him, and he was obliged to change his position. He dismounted, and stood at the side of his horse, turning as the Indian wheeled, so as to make a breastwork of the animal. Still the Indian sent his arrows flying, and one of them struck the horse in the shoulder.

Smarting with pain, the wounded animal went off at a gallop. As the Indian raised himself to his seat with a cry of triumph, the indignant white man discharged one of the barrels of his rifle at him; but the wily savage had dropped down by the side of his horse.

Supposing that he had drawn the fire of his enemy, the exultant Indian again raised himself to his seat, and fired quickly. The white man's rifle cracked again at the same instant, and the Indian's horse fell upon him. Seeing his enemy entangled by his horse, the white man rushed upon him with

his tomahawk; but, before he could reach him, the Indian was up, with his battle-ax in his hand.

The contest was now one of skill and strength; but both parties, having tried each other's mettle, fought slowly and warily, husbanding their wind for an effective stroke. The blows of each were so well parried, that the combatants became wearied in the encounter before either had sustained any serious injury, and they drew back, as if by mutual consent to recover breath.

At this juncture a sudden thought seemed to strike the Indian, who raised both of his hands above his head, with the forefingers locked. This, in the pantomimic language of the plains, understood by all the prairie Indians, was a sign of friendship. He then threw his battle-ax behind him, and stepped forward three paces, extending his right arm with the hand open.

The white man hesitated a moment, and then, as if ashamed of himself for mistrusting his late adversary, dropped his tomahawk, and advanced in his turn with extended hand.

"If you really are a friend, red-skin," he said, in the Dacotah dialect, "you have a strange way of showing it; but I am willing to forget and forgive."

"My white friend is a warrior," replied the Indian. "He is a great brave, and I am glad that I have met him. Let him come with me, and he shall share my lodge, and shall be my brother."

"Perhaps we had better wait a little before going so far. I am not quite so ready to join hands with a man who has just sought my life. You are a Blackfoot, I should say, judging from your paint. What name do you go by?"

"My brother has guessed well. I am a Blackfoot, and am a great brave among my people, who have named me White Shield. What is my brother called?"

"My name is Fred Wilder, and the red-skins call me Silver-spur, because, I suppose, I have always worn one of those articles among them."

The young man reached out his foot, showing a large silver spur, with a steel rowel, strapped upon his moccasin.

"I have heard of Silverspur from the Grovans and the

Kickarees, as well as from the Sioux. He is a great warrior and I am proud to know him. Let him share my lodge and be my brother. My people will be glad to see him."

"But the Blackfeet are enemies of the whites. How do I know but they may take my scalp?"

"White Shield is a great brave, and the Blackfeet will do what he tells them to do. They will never harm his brother, but will love and honor him."

"But I am a trapper, and must hunt beaver and otter. I am looking for the party of Mr. Robinette, which is on its way to the mountains. I must get traps and an outfit from them. Has White Shield seen them or heard of them?"

"I have heard of them; but they have not yet come into this country. My brother need give himself no trouble about them. Let him come with me, and he will find traps, and I will show him better beaver-streams than he has ever seen. He can live among the Blackfeet and trade with them, and can get more skins than any other trader."

It may have been the love of adventure that moved Fred Wilder, or it may have been the desire of gain, stimulated by the prospect that the Blackfoot held out to him. Impulsively he grasped the hand of White Shield, and the two pledged eternal friendship and brotherhood after the Indian fashion.

"My brother was fighting me a few moments ago," said Wilder. "Why was he so anxious to kill me? It is seldom that you red-skins dare to attack a white man singly, unless you have an advantage over him."

"White Shield is no coward," replied the Blackfoot. "It is long since I have taken a scalp, and my people have lately suffered many reverses. I wished to carry home a scalp, so that the Blackfeet in my village might wash the mourning paint from their faces. I did not know that my brother had the advantage of me, in owning a rifle that would shoot twice. I never saw such a rifle."

"I had the advantage of you in another point, after your horse was killed. You were afoot, while I might have mounted at any moment."

Wilder whistled, and his horse, which was grazing at a little distance, came running to him. He examined the

wound, which was a slight one, and transferred to the back of the horse the Indian's saddle and blankets and bridle. The two then set out toward the north-west, White Shield leading the way on foot.

CHAPTER III.

A SERIOUS REVERSE.

WHEN George Benning and his three companions set out on the trail of the marauders who had attacked their camp, they were all afoot; but they hoped soon to be able to get a remount, at the expense of some Indian horse-owners. The Indians always did their horse-stealing on foot, and there was no good reason why white men should not imitate their example.

"That sounds very well, cap'n," said Sam Glass, when Benning had presented this view of the subject, "and it will be easy enough to do, no doubt, provided that we ken find the Injuns; but we may hev to tramp many a mile, afore we come up on a village."

"No trouble about that, boy," replied Pap Byers. "We'll find Injuns enough, I warrant ye. The only p'int is, that we must be cautious and quiet, and I'd like to know how this yere Irishman's tongue is to be kep' still."

"Is it me tongue that you're spa'kin' of?" snapped Dennis Regan. "Sure, me tongue is as ready as your hand, any day."

"That's the trouble, Denny. It is a heap too ready, and is sartin to shoot off when it ain't wanted to."

"It hits the cinter ivery time, and that's more'n can be said av your rifle."

"We won't quarrel about it," interposed Captain Benning. "It is certain that Denny must learn to keep quiet, or he may bring us all into another scrape. Tramp is the word, boys."

It was not until the evening of the second day after they had started on the trail, that the party perceived indications which led them to believe that they were in the vicinity of an Indian village. Proceeding a little further, they heard the sound of bells, which the Indians sometimes attach to their horses, proceeding from a ravine a short distance to the left of the trail.

By a careful reconnoissance it was discovered that there was a large drove of horses in the ravine, feeding loose, on both sides of a little stream. The party withdrew to lay their plans, and it was arranged that they should enter the ravine, where each should select two horses from the drove, and should bring them to the head of the ravine, where all were to rendezvous. Benning was especially careful to warn his companions to be cautious and quiet, and to take no more horses than were necessary.

The four men entered the ravine at different points, and proceeded to select and secure their horses. This was accomplished without any misadventure, and Benning was the first to reach the head of the ravine, where he was soon joined by Pap Byers and Sam Glass, each mounted and leading a horse.

"We have succeeded very well so far," said the captain. "With these horses under us, and fresh ones to rest them, we ought to have the heels of any red-skins. Where is Dennis?"

"He'll be along directly, I reckon," replied Byers. "That he comes, on a run! What in thunder has the durned fool been doin'?"

The Irishman came up the ravine at a gallop, mounted on a fine mare, and leading two horses. The mare had a bell fastened to her neck, which clattered furiously as he rode up to his companions. Benning's face turned pale with anger, but he controlled himself, and spoke quite composedly.

"Why have you brought three horses when I told you to take but two? And why did you choose that bell mare? Don't you know that the noise will bring the Indians down upon us?"

"The mare was the finest av the lot, capt'in dear. She's betther than both the others, if I'm a jidge av horseflesh."

"That bell will be the ruin of us. It is a wonder that the whole drove has not stampeded after her."

"I was m'anin' to take it aff, sir, as soon as I could git the cratur' quiet," replied Dennis, as he dismounted.

The head of the ravine, where the four men were collected with their horses, was quite narrow, with steep sides, which were covered pretty thickly with trees and undergrowth.

Darkness was rapidly succeeding to dusk, and all were impatient to be off.

As Dennis dismounted, one of his led horses slipped its thong, and started off. When he turned hastily to catch it, he loosed the mare, which galloped away at full speed, her bell clattering noisily as she went. Directly there was a great commotion among the herd of horses down in the ravine and it was evident that they were stampeding.

"'Tare an' ouns!" exclaimed the indignant Irishman. "The bloody divil has got away, afther all me throuble. May ivery hair on her tail turn to a hickory sthick, to bate her as long as she can dhraw a breath."

"Hold your clattering tongue!" exclaimed Benning. "You make more noise than the infernal bell. The Indians will be down on us in no time, and we may thank our stars if we get out of this scrape. Mount the horse you are holding, and ride as if fire were behind you."

Dennis was about to mount, when he was suddenly seized from behind, and dragged into the bushes. The next instant the ravine was vocal with savage yells, and the white men found themselves surrounded with savage Indians.

Escape seemed impossible; but Benning was not a man to lose his life without an effort to preserve it. Loosing his led animal, he discharged his rifle at the group of Indians before him, and then, putting his horse to the top of his speed, dashed down the ravine, overturning and scattering his antagonists as he went.

Bullets and arrows flew after him; but he sped on unhurt, until he had gone about a quarter of a mile, when his horse suddenly stopped, in front of a perpendicular wall of rock, that seemed to close up the ravine.

Bewildered at meeting this unexpected obstacle, he was about to turn and endeavor to cut his way back in the opposite direction, when he reflected that he had been following the bed of a stream, which must surely cañon at the wall of rock.

Straining his sight through the growing darkness he saw what seemed to be an opening, and pushed his horse for it, bending down upon the horse's neck, to save his head from contact with the rocky roof. The horse went forward, slowly

but surely, and Benning thought that he was about to emerge from the cañon, when, to his great dismay, he found himself wedged fast in the opening. With words and kicks he tried to force his steed forward, but it would not budge. He had given himself up for lost; but an arrow from behind struck his horse in the rear, and, with a violent effort, it squeezed through the aperture.

Hardly had Benning issued from the cañon, when another peril confronted him. The horse stopped at the brink of a precipice. The rider could see that a prairie stretched out below him; but he could not guess how far down it might be, or what might await him at the foot of the rock.

There was no time for consideration. His pursuers were close behind him. He had to choose between certain death at the hands of the savages, and a fearful leap in the dark. He chose the latter alternative; but his horse refused to take the leap, backing away from the abyss, and snorting and trembling with terror. Drawing his knife, he struck it into the haunch of the animal. Maddened by the pain, the horse sprang forward into the gloom, and alighted, unhurt, upon the soft turf below.

Benning rode away slowly, thankful that his life had been preserved, and reflecting sadly upon the fate of his companions.

Of these, Dennis Regan had been pinioned as soon as he was seized, Sam Glass had been shot dead while attempting resistance, and Pap Byers had been soon overpowered and bound.

After relieving Glass of his scalp, the Indians took their two captives to the village, which was situated a short distance from the ravine in which their horses were kept.

In order to confine the captives, they were laid on their backs in the middle of the village, with their arms and legs stretched out, and tied by the hands and feet to stakes driven in the ground. In this uncomfortable position they were obliged to pass the night, while the savages made merry over their victory.

"See what a fix you have brought us into, you crazy little red-headed wretch!" exclaimed Pap Byers, after he had chafed and cursed himself into a perspiration.

"It's none of my bringin', you spider-shanked, pickle-faced ould drumhead!" replied Dennis. "It was jist that murtherin' divil av a sorrel mare that up-ended us and stretched us out here; but, fur all that, who knows but I'm the boy who will bring us safe out av this?"

"Talk's cheap, boy. Ken ye bring Sam Glass back to life? Thar's Cap'n Benning too; it's likely that he's got his pill afore this. Ken ye do any thin' fur him?"

"The mithers av 'em can't be more sorry fur the boys than is Denny Regan; but it's the divil's own tongue that says I fotched 'em into the scrape. If I was on me feet, I'd make yez swaller that same, you dried-up old wolf-skin."

"Quarrelin' won't mend the matter; but you know as well as I do, Denny, that it was your loose tongue and your crazy ways that made all the trouble."

"I know it jist as well as you do, and that's not at all. Tell me, now, Pap Byers, what Injuns is these that's got us?"

"Blackfeet—the bloodiest, meanest and most savagerous of all the red-skins in these parts."

"And what will they do wid us?"

"Kill us—tortur' us—burn us, most likely."

"Is it burnin' ye say? Och, be the powers! it makes me flesh crawl to think av it. The bloody haythins? Is it sure enough burnin' that they do, or do they jist bother a man and let him go?"

"It's burnin', I tell ye—burnin' by a slow fire—roastin', fryin', br'ilin'. Thar ain't any let go about it; it holds on fur hours, and you suffer death a dozen times afore you die onst."

"Howly mither of Moses! That bates purgatory intirely. To think that one av the ould shtock av the O'Regans should be roasted alive! I vow to the blissed Vargin, if I can only git clare of this shcraper, I'll not shpake a mortal word to any livin' man—or woman, fur that matter—fur a long six months, and I'll begin at onst to kape me vow."

The Irishman was silent. Byers spoke to him after a while; but Dennis did not reply. Again Byers spoke to him; but a snore was the only answer he received.

"I do believe," said he, "that the durned fool has gone to sleep. I wouldn't hev thought that burrin' would set so easy onto his stummick."

CHAPTER IV.

ASTONISHING THE BLACKFEET

FRED WILDER accompanied his new friend without any doubt or hesitation. He knew that the word of an Indian was sacred, when pledged to his adopted brother, and he felt no uneasiness as to the treatment he would receive among the Blackfeet.

In the course of three days they arrived safely at the Blackfeet village, where White Shield introduced his brother, Silverspur, as a great warrior, a man wonderful for strength of arms, keenness of eye, activity of limb, and bigness of heart. He related the particulars of the encounter in which he had formed the acquaintance of the white man, and gave him credit for extraordinary bravery and skill. He concluded by declaring that Silverspur was his sworn brother, and must be treated as such; that he must have full liberty to live among the Blackfeet, to hunt, fish and trade as he pleased, and to go and come as might suit his pleasure.

Instead of being displeased at the arrival of the white man, the Blackfeet appeared to be very well satisfied, and passed many encomiums upon White Shield for having brought such a valuable accession to their tribe. Some of them had heard of Silverspur, and could echo the praise that White Shield bestowed upon him. His rifle had sent death to more than one Blackfoot warrior, and they knew it; but that only added to his glory as a warrior, and they were proud to claim him as one of themselves. Good Ax, the head chief, granted him unlimited trading privileges, and invited him to "marry and settle"—in other words, to select a wife, or as many wives as he wanted.

Silverspur, whose heart had not been enamored by the fair-skinned beauties of his own race, and who was not likely to yield to the fascinations of any dusky damsel, evaded the matrimonial responsibility, saying that he thought it best to wait until he became better known, and that, in the mean time

he would share the lodge of White Shield, who happened to be a bachelor.

A few days after his introduction to the Blackfeet, on his return from a hunting-excursion, he found that a war-party, which had been absent for some time, had arrived at the village. They had been victorious over their adversaries, but had lost a few of their number, for which reason they were debarred from dancing, or rejoicing over their victory. On the contrary, the village was filled with mourning, and the wailing of the mourners, together with the horrible manner in which they mangled themselves, so disgusted the young man that he did not care to inquire further concerning the affair.

Soon after this, there was an alarm at the village, occasioned by the attempt of some marauders to steal horses. Most of the warriors went out to meet the enemy; but Fred Wilder, who did not care to expose his life in the quarrels of the red-men, remained in his lodge, smoking his pipe, and mentally abusing himself for the roving disposition that brought him into "the tents of Ishmael."

The affair was soon quieted, and the warriors returned in high glee. They had captured two prisoners, as White Shield informed his friend, and had taken a scalp. The mourning in the village, therefore, was at an end. All washed their faces, and prepared for a dance and a jollification.

As sleep was out of the question, in the midst of such an uproar, Wilder sallied out and joined the dancers. The scalp which was the occasion of the revelry, together with one which had been brought in by the war-party, was suspended upon a pole, and Wilder inspected them with the others. The hair of one of the scalps was short, black and curly. That of the other was short, thin and silver gray. It was evident to the young trapper that neither was the scalp of an Indian, and he called White Shield aside to speak to him concerning them.

"That black scalp yonder," said he, "is not the scalp of an Indian."

"No, it is the scalp of a white man."

"They were white men, then, who came to steal horses?"

"Yea; and the two prisoners are white men."

"Is the gray scalp the scalp of a white man, too?"

"Yes. We would have had a big dance over that scalp if we had not lost two warriors in the fight. It is the scalp of the white-haired chief."

"And who was he?"

"I thought you knew him. You call him Robinette, the trader."

"Whew! The old fellow is dead, then," said Wilder, musingly. "He was a strange man, shrewd, daring, but rather unscrupulous, as I have heard. Did your braves capture his train?"

"No. They came across his party, and stampeded the horses. As they had surprised the camp, they thought they might do more; but the white men beat them off at last. The men who came to-night were his men. They wanted to get back some of their horses, or to look for the white girl."

"What white girl?"

"The daughter of the white-haired chief."

"Is she here?"

"She is in the village. Has not my brother seen her?"

"No. I know nothing of her."

"You will not be likely to see her for a while, as Good Ax, the head chief, means to take her into his lodge, and she has been shut up from the village."

Wilder mused a little, and his musings were in this wise:

Why had Paul Robinette brought his daughter into that wilderness? Why had he, Fred Wilder, given himself up to an aimless and roving life? It was very foolish in both of them; but fate had led them to it. It was the fate of Mr. Robinette to be killed and scalped, and it might be the fate of him, Fred Wilder, to have come among the Blackfeet to be of service to the daughter of the murdered man. At all events, she was a woman, and it was his duty to befriend her. It was his duty, also, to befriend the two white captives, and their turn might come first. It would be well for him to see how far he might go with the Blackfeet.

Turning to White Shield, he said:

"What will be done with the white prisoners?"

"They will be burned."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. They are to be burned early to-morrow morning."

"I will bet you, White Shield, ten packs of beaver-skins, that they will not be burned while Silverspur lives."

"What does my brother mean?"

"I mean that I will not allow them to be burned."

"What will you do?"

"Perhaps I will do nothing; but they shall not be burned."

"Has my brother lost his senses? He surely does not mean what he says."

"You will see that I mean it. I am going to the lodge, White Shield. I am tired of this deviltry."

Wilder turned his back upon the crowd of dancing and yelling Indians, and retired to his lodge, where he pondered his own situation and that of Flora Robinette, until he fell asleep.

In the morning there was a great commotion in the village. Preparations were made for the torture of the two white captives, and all the Blackfeet were early astir. Two stout stakes were set in the ground, near the middle of the village, and the victims were brought to them, surrounded and followed by a motley throng of Indians, of all ages and both sexes.

Dennis Regan, who had not spoken a word since his vow of the previous night, was bound to one post, and Pap Byers to the other, and what may be called the small torturing commenced. Women and children assailed the white men with all sorts of opprobrious epithets, beat them with sticks, kicked them, pinched them, pulled their hair, and provoked them by every means in their power.

Byers hurled back their taunts indignantly, and abused the Blackfeet to the best of his ability. He knew what sort of a death they intended for him, and he hoped to arouse them to such fury that, in a moment of anger, they might kill him at once. He boasted of the number of their braves that he had slain, and accused them of cowardice, taunting them with not daring to take the life of a white man, even when he was bound before them. They could not hurt him, he said, and he dared them to do their worst, as a white warrior could teach them how to die. The Irishman remained silent. When he was spoken to, he pointed to his tongue, and shook his head but not a word escaped his lips.

The warriors soon put a stop to this play. Scattering the women and children, they brought poles and twigs, which they piled in a circle, nearly waist high, around the victims. Then, amid diabolical yells and screeches, fire was put to the piles, and the torture commenced.

It was not to last long. Hardly had the flames begun to crackle among the twigs, when Fred Wilder, fully armed, strode into the throng, kicked away the burning poles, stamped out the fire, and took his stand near the prisoners, gazing defiantly at the crowd of savages.

The Blackfeet were astonished at his audacity. Some of them laid their hands upon their weapons; but all drew back, as if bewildered, and wondering what might happen next. After a few moments, Good Ax, the head chief, stepped forward and addressed the intruder.

"Why does Silverspur seek to interfere with his brothers? Has he forgotten that when he became a Blackfoot, he ceased to be a white man?"

"My heart is white, and always will be," fiercely replied Wilder. "I can not stand by and see men of my own race murdered. What have these white men done to you, that you wish to burn them?"

"We caught them stealing our horses."

"They had a right to try to recover the property which you had taken from them."

"But the white men are the enemies of the Blackfeet."

"Say, rather, that the Blackfeet are the enemies of the white men, who have never mistreated you, and have never fought you except when you have compelled them to do so. Look at these men! One of them, as you can see, is not able to speak. Would you slay a man who has been stricken by the Great Spirit? I say that they shall not be burned while I live, and I know well that more than one of you will fall before I die."

It is said that a wild beast will shrink from the steady glance of a brave man. So did the savages quail before the fearless eye and undaunted demeanor of Fred Wilder. His audacity seemed almost supernatural, and made them fear that he might have something to back him which they could not even guess at.

In a few minutes, however, this feeling passed away. They saw that he was but a man, as they were, and they began to think of punishing him for his bold attempt to spoil their sport. Their threatening looks and hostile attitudes caused him to raise his rifle and level it at the most demonstrative. In another moment there might have been bloodshed; but White Shield suddenly changed the face of affairs. Bursting through the throng, he took his stand by the side of his friend.

"White Shield is a warrior!" he exclaimed. "He is a great brave, and he never feared the face of an enemy. There is none who can lay cowardice or crime to the charge of White Shield. Shall he hang back, like a dog, when his brother is in danger? Silverspur is his sworn brother, and he is ready to die for his brother, whether he is right or wrong. He is not wrong. These white men are his friends, and the Black-foot who would not try to save the life of his friend would be called a coward. Come, my brothers! Who will go to the spirit-land with White Shield and Silverspur?"

A number of the relatives of White Shield, both old and young, came forward, with their weapons in their hands, and ranged themselves by his side. As the hostile parties confronted each other, the affair seemed about to assume a serious aspect, when the head chief stepped forward and spoke:

"This is a small matter to us," he said, "and we would do wrong to kill each other about it. One of these prisoners, as Silverspur has said, has been stricken by the Great Spirit, and we can easily give the life of the other to our white brother. Loose them from the stakes, but let them be securely guarded. They shall live, but they must not leave us until we move the village. Is Silverspur satisfied?"

Wilder expressed his satisfaction, and pressed the hand of the chief. When the prisoners had been led away, and the crowd had dispersed, he returned to his lodge with White Shield.

CHAPTER V.

THE TEST OF FRIENDSHIP.

WHEN Wilder and his Blackfoot friend entered their lodge, the former sat down without speaking. White Shield gazed at him for some time, with a sort of admiring awe.

"My brother is very brave," said the Indian. "He is almost too brave. He has done a great thing to-day; but he came near losing his life. He had better be careful what he does now; for Good Ax looked at him very strangely, and the hearts of the warriors were hot.

"White Shield is a true brother," replied Wilder, as he grasped the hand of his friend. "Silverspur will never forget how his brother stood by him in danger. You tell me that I must be careful what I do; but there is one thing that I must do. I must see the girl, the daughter of the white-haired chief."

The Indian shook his head, and was silent.

"I must see the girl," repeated Wilder. "If you will help me, there will be no trouble about it. When I say that I will do a thing, I mean to do it."

"I have told you that Good Ax means that she shall be his wife, and no one can oppose the head chief. My brother had better be careful what he does."

"I tell you that I must see her, and I will see her. I only ask to see her and speak with her. If my brother will not help me, I will help myself."

The Blackfoot sat in silence a few moments, looking strangely at his friend.

"Wait for me," he said, as he arose and left the lodge.

After the lapse of an hour, White Shield returned, and beckoned to Wilder, who arose and followed him. They passed out of the village, and came to a small stream, on each side of which was a fine growth of timber. Entering the grove, White Shield pointed ahead of him.

"She is there," he said. "I will wait for you, but will not hear you."

As Wilder looked in the direction that was pointed out, he caught sight of a woman's dress, near the trunk of a large tree. He hastened forward, and in a few moments was in the presence of Flora Robinette.

The young lady did not appear to be eager for the meeting. She did not move from where she stood, and looked at him with wonder and something of suspicion as he advanced and held out his hand.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"A friend."

"I wish I could believe it. I was told by the Indian who brought me here, that, if I would wait, I would soon see one of my own race; but he said that you were no longer a white man; that you had joined the Blackfeet. What is your name?"

"I am called Fred Wilder; but it matters not what my name is. I am a white man and a friend. The Indian hardly told you the truth. He has taken a fancy to me, has adopted me as his brother, and has introduced me to his people; but I am far from considering myself one of them. This morning I saved two white men from death by fire, and I hope to be able to save you. It is certain that I shall use my best endeavors to do so. Before this I would have seen you; but I did not know that you were a captive, until I saw the Indians dancing around the scalps of your father and another man."

"My father's scalp! Good God! this is horrible. Did they tell you whose it was?"

"They told me that it was his, and then I learned the particulars of the attack upon his train."

"There was another scalp, you say—what did it look like?" asked Flora, with an accent and an air of painful interest.

"It was the scalp of a white man, and the hair was black short and curling."

"It was not his," muttered Flora, with a sigh of relief.

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of no one in particular—one of our party. I thought that some of my friends might have followed the trail of the Indians. Do you know who those two white men were whom you saved from burning?"

"I do not know their names. One was an Irishman, with red hair, and he seemed to be dumb."

"That might have been Dennis Regan; but he was any thing but dumb."

"The other was a tall and lean man, with keen eyes, a crooked nose, and a very solemn face."

"That was surely the man whom my father called Pap Byers. How did they happen to be captured?"

"They were trying to take horses from the Blackfeet, and were surprised. One was killed, and two were made prisoners."

"Was there no other? Did you hear nothing more?"

"One man escaped, and he had a wonderful escape, if I understood the account of the Indians."

"Who was he?"

"Really, Miss Robinette, you question me very closely concerning a person whom I have not seen. From what I have heard of him, it is my opinion that he was George Benning, one of Mr. Robinette's partisans."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Flora, as her emotions found vent in a flood of tears.

"It is plain enough that this young lady loves George Benning," thought Wilder. "He is a fine fellow, and I can't blame her. Here is no chance for me to fall in love, if I wished to do so, and I don't. She is very pretty; in fact, she is beautiful; but it is evident that I must go further before I find my fate."

Flora advanced, and held out her hand.

"I hope you will pardon me," she said, "if I have shown distrust of you. My father always spoke so harshly of men who had joined the Indians, that I have thought they must be very wicked men. I must trust you. I have no one else to look to, and God knows that I am grateful for your offers of assistance. Heaven has raised up a friend to me in my time of trouble, and I am indeed thankful. Do you think that you can deliver me from the hands of these savages?"

"I can try, and I hope you will not accuse me of boasting, when I say that I generally succeed in what I undertake."

"Would they kill me if I should fail to escape?"

"I think not; but they might do worse. I am told that the head chief designs taking you into his family."

"I have heard that white persons have sometimes been adopted by Indians."

"To speak plainly, he intends to adopt you as his wife."

"May God preserve me from such a fate! What shall I do, Mr. Wilder? Save me, and I will pray for you as long as I live! Tell me what can be done."

"You can do nothing, at present, but return to the village. You must leave the rest to me, and I do not know what I shall do; but you may be certain that I will do all that a man can do. Here comes the Indian to take you back."

White Shield approached, and signified to Flora that the interview had lasted long enough, and that she must return to the village. She accompanied him, and Wilder, by the direction of his friend, went to his lodge, where he passed a sleepless night in trying to devise a plan to release her from her captivity.

When the day broke, he had hit upon nothing that seemed to promise success, and he walked out, in the hope that the morning air would give him inspiration. In the course of his walk, he came to the conclusion that, if he was to accomplish any thing, it must be with the assistance of White Shield, and he resolved to throw himself upon the mercy of the Indian.

When White Shield entered the lodge that morning, he found Wilder seated on the ground, with his head buried in his hands, his attitude and countenance denoting the deepest dejection.

"I am in great trouble," he said, in answer to a question from the Indian. "My heart is very sore."

"Let my brother tell me his trouble. Perhaps I can help him."

"No one can help me but you. If you do not help me, I can live no longer. My brother, the daughter of the white-chief must not go into the lodge of Good Ax. I must

"It can be done, and it must be done. It can easily be done with your help. Will you not help me?"

White Shield shook his head mournfully.

"Then I must die. I have pledged my word to the white maiden. I have never yet broken my word, and, if I fail to keep it now, I can live no longer."

"Let my brother follow me," said White Shield, as he arose, with troubled looks, and walked out of the lodge.

Wilder followed him through the village, and out into the hills that lay to the westward. The young warrior went on swiftly and in silence, until he came to the brink of a precipice, that reached down, full three hundred feet in a perpendicular line, to the plain below. Here he stopped, and turned to his companion, with outstretched hand pointing downward.

"Let my brother ask me to throw myself from this rock," said he, "and I will do it. I am ready to die for my brother, when he bids me go to the spirit-land; but he asks more than death. If I should do what he asks me to do, I must betray my people, and must leave them forever for I should be cast out from among them, and even my father and my brothers would seek to kill me."

Wilder exhausted his arguments upon his friend, telling him that, if such a step were necessary, he would be no loser by severing his connection with the tribe, as he would be taken to the village of the white men, where he would be shown wonders without end, such as he could never have believed to be possible. The warrior sadly shook his head, and begged his brother to order him to throw himself from the cliff.

"It is enough," said Wilder, at last. "I can say no more. Here, White Shield, is my rifle that shoots twice. I give it to you, and I know that you will use it well. The pipe-holder, too, is yours. None like it was ever seen among the Blackfeet. Take my powder-horn also, and keep them all in remembrance of your brother."

"What does my brother mean? Why has he given me these things?"

"I have no more use for them. I am going to the spirit-land. Keep them, to remind you of Silverspur, whom you

forced to die. I must break my word, and I can live no longer. Farewell!"

Wilder stepped forward to the edge of the cliff, and threw up his hands.

With a sharp cry the Indian darted toward him, threw his arms around him, lifted him up bodily, and carried him back to a distance from the dangerous spot, where he laid him on the ground.

"Let my brother live!" said the warrior, as he kneeled by the side of the white man. "I will do what he asks me to do, though he asks more than my life. I will leave my people forever, and will follow him where he chooses to lead me. Is my brother satisfied?"

Wilder could not help pitying the Indian, whose genuine emotion had nearly overcome him; but he had gained his point, and he was satisfied. The two returned to the village, where they shut themselves up in their lodge, and made their arrangements for carrying away Flora Robinette.

During the day they selected five fleet horses—two for each of themselves, and one for the young lady, and concealed them in the grove where Wilder had his interview with Flora. They also secured sufficient ammunition, and a good supply of provisions, which they concealed in the same place.

After nightfall, when the village was quiet, White Shield set out alone, directing his friend to go to the grove and wait for him.

As Wilder passed through the village, he saw a pole in front of the medicine-lodge, from which were hanging the dried scalps of Mr. Robinette and Sam Glass. Some strange impulse caused him to take the gray scalp from the pole, and to thrust it into the bosom of his hunting-shirt, the general receptacle of trappers for all odds and ends. He then went to where the horses were concealed and waited for the companions of his journey.

In a few moments they appeared, and Flora held out her hand to Wilder, expressing regret for having distrusted him. He told her that they had no time for words, that it was useless for her to thank him before he had accomplished any thing, and that their present duty was to get away from the Black-feet as fast as possible.

They mounted, therefore, and rode swiftly toward the southwest until they struck the main stream of the Missouri, which they followed in the direction of the mountains.

CHAPTER VI.

A CROW VICTORY.

AFTER the failure of his horse-capturing expedition the reflections of George Benning were far from pleasant. He had not only met with poor success in getting horses, but had lost his three companions. His own escape had been wonderful, his life having been in the greatest peril, and he was sure that a horrible death would be the fate of those who had been taken. His only consolation was in the thought that he had done all in his power to render the expedition a success, and that it had not failed through any fault of his own. If he could blame himself for any thing, it was only for having taken Dennis Regan as one of his party.

He found himself alone, and further than ever from the object which he had undertaken, the rescue of Flora Robinette. He still had his strength and his weapons, and had a good horse under him; but what could one man do against a tribe of Indians? He had no thought, however, of giving up the search; but was determined to persevere, if it should take a lifetime, until he could recover the lady of his love, or learn her fate.

He rode on until he was satisfied that the Indians did not intend to pursue him any further, when he halted by the side of a wooded stream. Here he kindled a little fire, cooked and ate his supper, and, after tethering his horse, wrapped himself in his blanket, and lay down to sleep.

It was long before sleep visited his eyelids; but when it did come it seemed that it would never leave him. He was awoke, at last, by some strange sounds, which had formed part of his dreams. Starting up, he perceived that it was broad daylight, and that he was surrounded by a group of Indians. Many

others could be seen in the timber and on the plain, and a number of horses were feeding along the stream.

There was no chance to escape, if he had thought it advisable to make the attempt. A brief glance showed him, however, that these Indians were Crows, who were generally considered friendly to the white men, although Pap Byers had been certain that they were Crows who had made the attack upon Mr. Robinette's encampment.

If he had any doubts, they were soon dispelled by one of the chiefs, who approached him, and greeted him kindly, asking how he happened to be there alone.

As it was possible that the opinion of Byers might have been correct, Wilder thought it best to say nothing concerning the disaster to Mr. Robinette's expedition. He stated that he, with three companions, had been endeavoring to recover some horses that had been taken from them by the Blackfeet; that they were caught in the attempt, and his friends had been killed or captured, while he had made a narrow escape from his pursuers.

The chief informed him, in return, that they were a war-party, who had set out for the purpose of taking some horses or scalps, and asked how far it was to the Blackfoot village.

Wilder replied that it was distant not more than two hours' ride, and pointed out the direction in which he supposed it to lie. At the same time he proffered his services to the Crows, if they should attack the Blackfeet, hoping that his friends had been captured, and that he might be able to rescue them.

Spies were sent to reconnoiter the village, and the Crows staid where they were during the remainder of the day. Toward evening the spies came in, and reported that the village consisted of about two hundred lodges, but there did not seem to be many warriors in it.

The Crow chief waited for another band, that was expected the next day. On their arrival, he divided his warriors into two parties, one of which was to attack the village from the west, and the other from the east. Shortly after dark they had reached their stations; but their approach had been discovered, and the surprise was not as perfect as they hoped to make it. They charged in, however, and, after a brief struggle, drove their adversaries from the village.

Those of the Blackfeet warriors who survived this contest, together with their women and children, took refuge in a dense thicket, where they fortified themselves as well as they could, and defended the position with the obstinacy of despair.

While the efforts of the Crows were devoted to dislodging their enemies from this refuge, George Benning hastened through the village in search of his late companions.

He soon found Pap Byers and Dennis Regan. They had been left in an open lodge, guarded by two Indians. When their guards had been killed or driven away, they came out, and found themselves at liberty.

Byers was very thankful for his deliverance, and expressed gratitude quite warmly; but the Irishman remained silent. Instead of replying to the questions that Benning addressed to him, he only shook his head, and pointed to his tongue.

"What is the matter with Denny?" asked the partisan, in surprise.

"The critter has gone dumb," replied Byers. "When I told him that the red-skins allowed to burn us, he swore that he wouldn't speak a word for six months, if he could git out of the scrape. I thought the durned fool was jokin'; but it seems he was in 'arnest, as he has helt 'out so fur without speakin'."

"If he had made that resolution earlier, it would have been better for all of us. How did it happen that you were not burned?"

"The red-skins took us out to roast us. They tied us to stakes and built a fire around us. It was all up with this child, I allowed, and the fire was jest beginnin' to scorch, when a white man stepped in and scattered the fire, and swore that they shouldn't burn us while he lived."

"I should think he would not have been likely to live long, after that."

"I tell ye, cap'n, he skeered 'em. Some of them red-skins nearly turned white. Thar was some talk, and then a lot of red-skins j'ined the white man, and thar was a right smart chance fur a big row; but it quieted down arter a bit, and then they turned us loose."

"It is very strange. It is seldom that a man gains

such influence among the Blackfeet. Do you know who he was?"

"They called him Silverspur. He was young, but a right smart chance of a man."

"Silverspur? I have heard of him; in fact, I have seen him. His name is Wilder, if I remember rightly. He is a brave man, and fine-looking, but of an unsettled disposition. It would not surprise me if he had joined the Blackfeet. If he has, they will not keep him long. What has become of Sam Glass?"

"He was killed in the scrimmage. The red-skins danced over his scalp and Mr. Robinette's the night they took us."

"Mr. Robinette's?"

"Yes, sir. I was mistaken about its bein' the Crows who raised the old man's ha'r. They were Blackfeet who pounced onto us."

"Did they carry away Miss Flora, or was she killed? Have you heard any thing about her?"

"She was here; but she's gone now; and that's why you had sech an easy time whippin' this village of Blackfeet. Ef it hadn't been fur her, the job would hev been a leetle tougher I reckon."

"How so? What do you mean?"

"I heerd the red-skins torkin' about it. That white man, Silverspur, kerried her off last night, and one of the red-skins went with him. Leastways, she was missin', and so war those two men. Thar was a big hullabaloo raised this mornin', as the head chief had sot his eye on her fur a wife, and they war mad, too, about the red-skin goin' off with Silverspur. A right smart chance of warriors mounted and rode off arter 'em and that's how thar warn't many in the village when you came."

"Was she willing to go with that—with Silverspur?"

"How do I know? I reckon she was, as she mought easy enough hev staid here, whar a thousand red-skins wanted to keep her."

"Of course. I ought not to have asked such a question. When did the warriors start?"

"The sun was nigh an hour high when they got off."

"Shouldn't wonder if the cap'n has gone crazy" muttered

Byers, as George Benning hastened away, in search of the chief who commanded the war-party of the Crows.

He had met him returning from the thicket in which the remaining Blackfeet had taken refuge. In their efforts to dislodge their enemies from that position, the Crows had sustained serious loss, and had concluded that the game was not worth the candle. They had abandoned the siege, therefore, and were about to collect the horses of the Blackfeet, preparatory to returning home.

It was Benning's belief that the Blackfeet warriors who had gone in pursuit of Silverspur and his companions would be likely to overtake the fugitives, in which event they would at once return to their village. He hoped to be able to induce the Crows to follow their trail, and meet them as they came back. They would thus easily gain another victory, which ought to be, as he supposed, a sufficient inducement for them to do as he wished them to.

But the Crow, when Benning presented this view of the case to him, steadily refused to do any thing of the kind. His party had come out for a special purpose, he said. That purpose had been accomplished, and it was their duty to return. Besides, several warriors had been lost in the attack upon the Blackfeet in the thicket, and it was their custom, when such a misfortune had befallen a war-party, to return immediately to their village, and to mourn for the fallen before attempting any other achievement.

All the arguments that Benning could use were ineffectual to change the determination of the chief, and he declared his intention of following the trail alone, in the hope that chance might in some way give him an opportunity of aiding Flora Robinette.

From this he was dissuaded by Pap Byers and the chief. The former represented to him that he would be unable to do any thing alone, and the latter advised him to accompany the warriors to the Crow village. He might there represent the case, the chief said, to Bad Eye, the chief of the village, who would be sure to sympathize with him, and would probably place a body of warriors under his control, for an expedition against the Blackfeet.

These arguments were so strongly advanced, and appeared

so reasonable, that Benning reluctantly consented to accompany the Crow warriors, and set out with a heavy heart.

It must be said, although George Benning would not have liked to make the admission, that he felt very ill at ease concerning the company in which Flora Robinette had left the Blackfeet. He had hoped to rescue her himself; but another had been before him, and that other was a handsome, brave, and impulsive fellow, who might be as energetic and victorious in love as Benning knew him to be in war. What could be more likely than that he should fall in love with fair Flora Robinette, and what better opportunity could a man have for pressing his suit, than just when he had rescued the lady of his love from captivity among savages?

The more Benning thought of this, the more it troubled him. From what he had seen and heard of Fred Wilder, he had formed a high opinion of him; but he now began to torture himself with doubts and suspicions, which were not flattering to the character of Silverspur. If that person should succeed in getting Flora safely out of the clutches of the Blackfeet, there was no knowing what mean advantage he might take of her position and his achievement. Benning had never declared his love to Flora. He had thought that she had perceived it, and he had seen indications that led him to hope that his love was returned; but that was all. It would be only natural, if Wilder should address her, that she should feel herself bound in honor to listen favorably to the man who had saved her from a fate that might have been worse than death. It was highly probable, indeed, that she would consent to marry him, if she found that no objection could be urged against him.

These thoughts troubled the young partisan so much, that he had little rest during his journey with the Crows, and he was glad indeed when they reached their village.

When the ceremony of reception was over, and while the whole village was lamenting for the fallen braves, he sought the head chief, Bad Eye, to whom he told his story, declaring that he believed Flora Robinette to be still in the possession of the Blackfeet, and beseeching aid to deliver her from their hands.

Bad Eye was a fine-looking Indian, considerably past mid

dle age, differing somewhat in features from the rest of the Crows, if not in color. His left eye was sightless, from which peculiarity he had received his cognomen ; but the remaining eye was unusually bright and keen.

He listened to Benning's tale very attentively, and the partisan, knowing the usually stolid nature of the Indian character, was surprised at the emotion which he manifested.

"The white-haired chief, then, is dead," he said. "Some worse men have died, and many better men. He was hard in his dealings with the red-men, but did not treat them as badly as some traders have done. The Blackfeet must not keep his scalp, to dry in their lodges, if Bad Eye can take it from them. But his daughter is safe, I think. I know something of Silverspur, and I know that he always does what he undertakes to do. I must think of this matter. I can do nothing without consulting the counselors. When I know what to do, I will tell you."

Benning was obliged to be satisfied with this answer, and he waited impatiently to learn the intentions of the chief.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PASS.

FLORA ROBINETTE, with her white and red companions, rode rapidly away from the Blackfeet. It was her wish, as Wilder had ascertained, that she might be taken direct to her father's usual trapping rendezvous, on the head-waters of Green River. In accordance with this wish, they soon crossed the Missouri, and shaped their course toward the south, intending to keep near the hills, in order to avoid wandering parties of Crows or other Indians.

White Shield, with a gloomy countenance, led the way, seldom speaking unless he was spoken to. Wilder and Flora followed, with little to say to each other.

The Blackfoot came to the conclusion, in the course of the night, that it would be better to cross the mountains at a

pass near the waters of the Missouri, than to remain on the eastern side of the range. The route, therefore, was again changed toward the west.

When morning came, they halted to prepare some food. Flora was so exhausted by loss of sleep, and by the long and rapid ride of the night, that she needed rest; but she was so fearful and excited that she was unable to snatch a few moments' sleep. She sat by the fire, and conversed with Wilder, while White Shield, moody and meditative, sat apart, and smoked in silence.

"I hope you have forgiven me," she said, "for distrusting you when you first offered me your assistance. I heard that you had joined the Blackfeet, and I was afraid of you."

"Perhaps you were afraid that I would fall in love with you, and that I would try to push George Benning from the throne. You need not have entertained such a fear, as it is not at all likely that I will fall in love with you."

"That is consoling, if not complimentary."

"You are beautiful enough, no doubt; but I believe I am proof against beauty. If you happened to have a sister, and if she happened to be as beautiful as yourself, and a little older, and not quite so highly civilized, I might fancy her; but you are not wild enough, Miss Robinette, for Fred Wilder."

"Unfortunately, I have no sister. I hardly know for which I ought to be the most grateful, for my deliverance from the Indians, or for your kindness in not falling in love with me."

"It must be a satisfaction to know that you have not jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. But this is too serious a subject to joke about, Miss Robinette. You are not safe yet. It is a long journey to the rendezvous, and God only knows what enemies we may meet before we reach it. The Blackfeet, too, will be likely to follow us; but I hope we have too good a start to let them overtake us."

"We ought to make sure that we escape, at least. Ought we not to continue our journey?"

"I suppose we must, if you really can not rest. My Blackfoot brother seems to be getting uneasy."

In fact, White Shield came up at that moment, and told them that they must delay no longer, that Good Ax and his

warriors would be on their trail, and that it was necessary to cross the mountains before they should be overtaken. They mounted, accordingly, and set forward at a smart pace.

A few hours' ride found them fairly within the hills, and they halted on the summit of the highest they had reached, for a brief rest.

Their rest was very brief. The Blackfoot, looking back on their trail, pointed out to Wilder some dark objects that were speeding across the plain in the distance. It was soon evident that the dark objects were men on horseback, and that they were following the trail of the fugitives.

The white and red friends looked at each other. They knew that those Indians were Blackfeet who were bent upon their capture, and their looks denoted a determination to die rather than be taken.

"What shall we do, White Shield?" asked Wilder. "For my part, the Blackfeet shall not take me alive. I will fight them to the last."

"White Shield will fight with his brother. He can do nothing else. The Blackfeet hate me worse than they hate you. If we were only men, we might escape; but we have a woman with us, and she is now very tired."

Flora Robinette, who had listened to the conversation, and who had seen the approaching enemies, begged her friends to make haste to escape while there was time to do so. She was not tired, she said. She could ride as fast as they wished to ride, and they need not be afraid that she would hinder them.

"There is but one thing to do," said the Blackfoot. "The pass is a difficult one, and there is a place at which one man can defend it against a hundred. We will stop there, my brother, and will fight."

"Let us make haste, then, and reach it."

The lapse of an hour found them in a narrow defile in the heart of the mountains. With difficulty they forced their horses up a steep incline, to the summit of the declivity, beyond which the trail was broad and easy. The Indian stopped and looked back, pointing down the defile.

"There are not enough warriors with Good Ax," said he, "to take this pass, while it is defended by one brave man."

"But they might surround us," replied Wilder, "or they might starve us out in time."

"I shall not stay here long enough to get hungry; but we will gain time. I will defend the pass, while my white brother and sister ride on and get far from their enemies."

"You will do no such thing, White Shield. We can not allow you to sacrifice yourself for us, or to fight the Blackfeet, who are your brothers."

"I am no longer their brother."

"But you must not fight them. I will defend the pass, while you ride forward with Miss Robinette. You need not object, for I am determined that it shall be so. Is there any way by which the Blackfeet can get behind me?"

"There is a way; but it would take them several hours to get behind you."

"Ride on, then, and I will keep them off as long as I can. Don't be afraid, Miss Flora. You may safely trust yourself with my brother."

The Indian reluctantly consented to this arrangement, and pointed to a white-topped peak, far to the westward.

"The trail is plain enough," said he, "and it leads to that peak. If you do not find us there, you will find an arrow, to show you which way we have gone."

Flora rode away with the Indian, after a few words of encouragement from Wilder, who then set himself at work to strengthen his position.

His first care was to collect a number of bowlders, as large as he could lift or roll. These he placed at the head of the declivity, blocking up the defile, until the pile was breast high.

This done, and the condition of his rifle and ammunition carefully examined, he sat down to fortify his inner man, while he calmly awaited the approach of the Blackfeet.

It was about noon when he heard them coming, and soon he saw them, and was able to count them, as they entered the defile. They were twenty in number, including the chief, who was conspicuous in the advance. All had led horses, so that they could change when the animals they rode became weary, which accounted for the rapidity with which they had followed in pursuit.

On they came, urged forward by the chief, uttering guttural exclamations as they forced their animals up the incline.

It must be said, to the credit of Fred Wilder, that he was unwilling to cause the death of any of the red-men whose hospitality he had lately shared, unless self-defense should compel him to do so. He hailed them, therefore, and ordered them to halt.

A parley ensued between him and Good Ax, by whom he was at once recognized. The chief demanded that Flora Robinette and White Shield should be given up, promising the white man that he would be allowed to go his way. Wilder declared that nothing of the kind should be done, adding that his red brother and the lady were far beyond pursuit. If the Blackfeet attempted to force the pass, he said, they would do it at the peril of their lives. As he did not wish to hurt them, he advised them to go home.

Good Ax was so enraged that he ordered an immediate attack. The Blackfeet led their horses down the slope, to be out of the way, and rushed up to the assault; but Wilder was ready for them.

Having arranged his bowlders for immediate use, he sent one of them whirling down the declivity, and followed it with another. The Indians, unable to escape the ponderous missiles that came bounding and thundering among them, screamed and yelled like demons, and all who were able to do so made a precipitate retreat.

Wilder took advantage of the pause that ensued, to again advise them to go home, assuring them that it went quite against his grain to harm his good friends, the Blackfeet. A volley of execrations was the only answer he received, and the Indians, unwilling to face the rolling stones, sought such cove as they could find, hoping to pick him off with their guns.

Safe behind his barricade, Wilder watched their proceedings very composedly, not deigning to reply to their fire unless they showed a disposition to approach him, when a well-directed shot from his rifle warned them to keep their distance.

Affairs continued in this condition for upward of half an hour, and the young man was beginning to wonder when there would be a change, when he was startled by a slight noise above him, and a piece of stone fell at his feet. Knowing

that there must be some cause for such an effect, he looked up, and saw an Indian clinging to the side of the rock, and another making his way in the same direction. They had gone thus far unobserved ; but the foremost had stepped on a narrow ledge, which had shaken under his weight, causing him to utter a slight exclamation.

Seeing the looseness of the ledge, Wilder pried it out from the main rock with his tomahawk, and it fell with a crash, dropping the Indian at his feet. It took Wilder but an instant to dispatch this foe with his tomahawk, and then, seizing his rifle, he shot down the other, who was still clinging helplessly to the face of the cliff.

The Blackfeet, who had counted on the attempt of their two braves to divert the attention of Wilder from their main attack, rushed fiercely up the defile, but soon found that he was not to be taken unawares. Rolling over two of his bowlders, he sent them crashing down among his assailants, sweeping them away at a serious loss of life and limb.

Then came another season of comparative quiet, which lasted until Wilder began to suspect that the Indians, or a portion of them, had gone around by the route which White Shield had spoken of, with the intention of getting in his rear. Reconnoitering as well as he could, he came to the conclusion that his suspicions were correct, and that it would be best for him to make his exit as speedily as possible.

Collecting more bowlders, he piled them up in front of him, jamming them in for the purpose of blocking up the defile as well as he could, and of concealing his movements from the enemy. As he would have several hours' start of the Blackfeet who had gone around, he had nothing to fear but from those who might have been left in front to watch him. It would probably be some time, he calculated, before the latter would discover that he had evacuated the position. Then it would take them half an hour to get up the slope with their horses, and about as much longer to demolish his barricade. This would give him plenty of time to get out of the way.

He quietly led his horses down to the plain and broad trail, where he mounted and rode off at a gallop. He did not slacken his speed, except when he stopped to change from one horse to the other, as he was anxious to reach before night

the peak which White Shield had pointed out to him. It was further off than he had supposed it to be, and it was dusk when he found himself at its base.

He was soon convinced that White Shield and Flora were not in the vicinity, and he found, after a little search, a split stick with an arrow stuck in it, pointing toward the south. They could not have got very far ahead of him, he thought, and he hoped that he might be able to overtake them where they had stopped to rest for the night.

He rode on ; but he soon learned that following their trail was slow work to a man in the saddle, although the moon was shining. He then took his course by the stars, and rode south at a gallop, believing that he could not go far out of the way, and every minute expecting to overtake his friends.

He rode until the night was half gone, and the moon was down, without seeing a sign of a human being. Sure that he must have overtaken them if he was on the right track, and being greatly fatigued, he deemed it best to camp where he was for the night, and to hunt for the trail in the morning.

He tethered his horses, wrapped himself in his blanket, and laid down to sleep. Thoughts of his missing friends troubled him for a while ; but they were soon swallowed up in a deep and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARTIN LAURIE'S LITTLE SCHEME.

IN the morning Fred Wilder set out to seek for the trail of his companions ; but, after a long and careful search, he was unable to find it, and he abandoned the quest in despair. As he had seen or heard nothing of the Blackfeet, he concluded that they had given up the pursuit, and had returned to their village.

The disappearance of the Blackfoot and Flora Robinette was not incomprehensible to him, for it was very likely that he had lost the trail ; but he could not help fearing that it

was to be attributed to some other cause. It was possible that White Shield had been troubled in conscience concerning the manner in which he had left his tribe, and that he might have gone back to meet the pursuers, hoping to make peace with them by delivering Flora to Good Ax. It was possible, also, that he might have taken a fancy to the fair prize, and that he might have determined to secure her for himself, thus cheating his white brother, as well as his tribe.

Fred Wilder's manly heart made him reject these unworthy suspicions as fast as they arose in his mind. He could not believe that the Indian, who had sworn brotherhood to him, and who had so thoroughly proved his friendship, would so easily turn traitor. In fact, he felt sure that he could trust him, whatever appearances might be against him. The probability was, Wilder thought, that he had lost their trail, which must lead direct to Mr. Robinette's rendezvous. Still, it seemed strange that they had not waited for him, or tried to find him, as he supposed they might easily have done.

Stifling his fears as well as he could, he rode toward the south, shaping his course for the rendezvous, where he hoped to find his missing companions.

It was a long journey, and there was not a little peril connected with it; but, by the use of vigilance and caution, he contrived to keep clear of any predatory bands of Indians, and the end of two weeks found him on a stream which he believed to be one of the head branches of Green River.

The sun was nearly on the meridian when he was riding along the pleasant stream, in the shade of the cottonwoods and willows, meditating on his vagrant life, and wondering whether he would ever settle down and become a quiet and steady citizen. Thoughts of dinner were also in his mind, and were further provoked by the sight of a thin column of blue smoke, curling up above the tree-tops before him. He stopped at once, with a true woodman's caution, and speculated upon the smoke and its cause.

He thought that he could not be far from the rendezvous, and it was not likely that there would be any hostile Indians so near a large assembly of white men. It was more probable that some hunters had chosen the spot for the purpose of enjoying their noon meal. Wilder was willing

enough to join them ; but he thought it best to use caution, as he could not be certain whether he was to meet friends or enemies.

He dismounted, tethered his horses, and quietly picked his way through the undergrowth toward the smoke. He was soon near enough to perceive two white men seated by the remains of a fire. Near them was the carcass of an antelope, from which they had made their meal. Both men were smoking, and a flask that lay between them denoted that they were not destitute of another creature comfort much prized in the wilderness.

Wilder was about to step forward and join them, when he was stopped by an exclamation that one of them made. He heard Flora Robinette's name, used in a manner that strongly attracted his attention, and made him anxious to hear more of the conversation.

Crawling up closer, and concealing himself behind the trunk of a large cottonwood, he looked and listened. He knew both of the men, one of whom was Martin Laurie, Mr. Robinette's agent, and the other was Jacob Farnsworth, also one of the trader's employés.

"You think, then, that you can find the girl?" asked Farnsworth.

"I am pretty certain of that," replied the Scotchman.

"What will you do with her when you get her?"

"It seems to me, my friend, that you are becoming inquisitive."

"I suppose I am; but it is a matter that concerns me a little."

"How so?"

"Look here, Martin Laurie. You might as well be open and straight-forward; for I know you as well as you know yourself. You expect to rescue the girl, and to have the finger-ing of old Robinette's money."

"You may think what you please about it. Suppose that what you say were true, how would it affect you?"

"More than you may think. I might hinder or help you as I chose. You don't want to tell me your plans; but you will have to do it. The Scotch are very keen; but they are no sharper than the Yankees. I can tell you that you will

never touch the old man's money-bags, unless you change your plans."

"You are only trying to pump me, Jake Farnsworth."

"I am not. I am speaking for your own interest. I know what I am saying; for I have the will."

"The will! What will?"

"Paul Robinette's will."

"The deuce! I didn't know that he left a will."

"I have one copy, and the other copy is in St. Louis."

"What does it say?"

"Don't you wish you knew? I will tell you, on condition that you will give me a third of what you make by the operation. Your plans will amount to nothing, unless you know what is in the will. You might go to St. Louis, and examine the other copy; but your chances would be all gone before you could get back. If you will come to terms I will tell you what I know, and will help you with your plans. If you won't, you may as well load up your traps and quit the ground."

"I will agree to what you say, if your information really causes me to change my plans."

"That is fair enough. I will guarantee that it will surprise you."

"Very well. Out with it."

"The will is a strange one, and perhaps there is a touch of hypo in it; but I have no doubt that it would stand in the courts. In fact, it was drawn by a lawyer, who ought to have known his business. It seems that the old man was quite a monomaniac on the subject of being killed by Indians. He had a presentiment that he would be scalped by them some day, and the fear that his scalp would remain in their possession, and be smoke-dried in their lodges, always preyed upon his mind."

"It may have been second-sight, for he was killed and scalped after escaping for so many years."

"I know that; but listen to the arrangement he made by his will. He divided his property into two equal portions, one of which is to be given to the man who recovers his scalp from the Indians. The other half is to be his daughter's on condition she marries the man who recovers his scalp."

Fred Wilder uttered an involuntary exclamation, and felt in the breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt, to see whether the gray scalp was secure.

"I thought I heard something," said Farnsworth, looking around. "It must have been one of our horses. If she refuses to marry that man, she will get but the income of her share during life, and at her death it will go to a charity in St. Louis."

"Suppose the scalp should not be recovered."

"Then that share is to go to the same charity. You can judge, now, whether the will changes your plans."

"I must confess that it will change them considerably. It will be of more importance to me to secure the scalp than the girl. It is a queer will. The old man must have been crazy."

"His head was clear enough, as you well know, and we need make no question about the will. If you can recover the scalp, the girl will be obliged to marry you, or she will get nothing from the property worth speaking of. The two halves, put together, would make a right handsome pile."

"They would, indeed, and I could afford to give you a share. I must secure both the scalp and the girl. I see no objection that Miss Flora could have to marrying me. I have always been considered a proper man."

"Proper enough, no doubt; but young ladies have strange fancies sometimes. Where do you expect to find her?"

"Among the Crows."

"That is strange."

"Rather strange, I admit, but none the less true. Pap Byers, who was one of the party when we were attacked, picked up a Crow blanket and a Crow moccasin after the fight, and he was sure that they were Crows who stampeded us."

"But the Crows never molest white people."

"Very seldom, it is true; but this may have been a party of young braves who were returning from an expedition which had not resulted to suit them, and they may have wanted to carry home a few horses or scalps, thinking that they would not be found out. War-parties dislike to return empty-handed."

"That is true, and you are probably right in supposing that the assailants were Crows. If so, they have the scalp and Miss Flora. But how will you get them?"

"George Benning wanted to go in search of the young lady, and I let him take Pap Byers and Sam Glass and a green young Irishman. If they found her, they were to bring her to the rendezvous; but I have neither seen nor heard anything of them."

"Perhaps they have been rubbed out."

"It is very likely. They were afoot, and their first movement would have been to steal some horses from the Indians. That might have brought them into trouble."

"If Benning is out of the way, it will be all the better for you, as I have heard that he was getting fond of Miss Flora, and he is, or was, a likely young fellow."

"It would pain me greatly to hear of his death."

"None of your hypocrisy, Martin Laurie. We know each other too well for that. What do you mean to do now?"

"I can do nothing until after the next rendezvous, in August. Then I shall go up among the Crows, and have no doubt that I shall be able to trade with them for both the girl and the scalp, giving them to understand that they shall not be troubled about that little affair."

"Very well. I will keep your counsel, and will help you all I can. We had better be getting back to camp, before they send out a party to search for us. Shall we take the rest of this antelope?"

"It is not worth while. We will leave that much for the wolves."

The two men mounted their horses, and rode down the stream. Fred Wilder waited until they were out of sight when he also mounted, and followed them slowly, reflecting on what he had heard.

He soon reached the camp, where he saw both Laurie and Farnsworth, together with a number of trappers and friendly Indians; but he kept his own counsel, saying nothing of his late adventures, or of Flora Robinette or the gray scalp.

CHAPTER IX.

A DOG IN THE WAY.

It was evident to Wilder, from the first of the conversation that he listened to, between Laurie and Farnsworth, that White Shield had not brought Flora Robinette to the rendezvous. He was not really surprised at this; but his fears were awakened and strengthened, and he could not avoid an oppressive feeling of anxiety. He made no inquiries about them, but remained a week at the encampment, hoping that they might come in.

At the end of that time, as he had heard nothing of them, he was forced to the conclusion that his suspicions had been too well founded, and that White Shield had betrayed him. It was possible that they might have been captured by some roving band of Indians; but it was not at all probable that so brave and wily a warrior as the Blackfoot would have suffered himself to be taken by any enemy. Wilder could only believe that he had gone back to the Blackfeet, or that he had taken possession of Flora for purposes of his own.

Quite despondent, the young man sallied out one morning on a hunting-excursion. He went alone, hoping to meet with some excitement that would prevent his mind from brooding over his half-accomplished achievement. He was by no means prepared to abandon the object with which he had left the Blackfeet. On the contrary, he was determined that he would not be so easily outdone, and it was his intention to seek for the missing companions of his flight, to rescue Flora from the Indians, and to punish White Shield for his treachery.

He had poor luck with his hunting that morning, the reason being, probably, that his mind was too much occupied with other matters. Somewhat discouraged, he ascended a hill, from which he could have a good view of the surrounding country, and looked to see whether any game was visible.

In the distance he descried a dark object, slowly moving over the plain. He was sure that it was no four-legged

animal, and was soon convinced that it was a man on foot ; but he could not tell whether it was an Indian or a white man.

Curious to know who the solitary traveler could be, he descended the hill, and rode toward the object. The man discovered him, and seemed to wish to avoid him ; but there was no way of escaping on the prairie, and at last he stopped, waiting the approach of the horseman.

As he drew near to the stranger, Wilder perceived that he was an Indian. Nearer yet, he thought that he discovered a resemblance in his features to those of White Shield. Yes ; it must be his red brother ; for the Indian recognizes him, and runs eagerly forward to meet him. Wilder is surprised ; he can not believe that this is the athletic and fine-looking warrior from whom he lately separated ; for the form of White Shield is fearfully emaciated, his eyes are hollow, he is entirely without arms, and the few garments that remain to him hang about him in tatters.

Instead of advancing to meet him, Wilder reined in his horse, and leveled his rifle at the Indian.

" Shall I shoot you now ?" he said ; " or shall I wait until I hear what you have to say ?"

The Blackfoot, who did not attempt to conceal his surprise, advanced no further, but looked steadily at the leveled rifle.

" If my brother wishes to kill me," he replied, " let him shoot. White Shield is ready to go to the spirit-land."

" Are you sure that you are ready ? Is there nothing you have done that frightens you ?"

" White Shield is not afraid. His heart is clean, and his tongue is straight. The path is broad before him. Let my brother shoot."

" Why have you betrayed me ?"

" White Shield betrayed his own people, to please his brother. Is it for that reason that he is called a traitor ? Let Silverspur shoot."

Wilder could not contain himself any longer. The truth and affection of the Indian were so manifest, that he felt that he could not blame himself sufficiently for his suspicions. He leaped from his horse, threw his rifle upon the ground, ran to the Indian, and fairly hugged him.

" The heart of Silverspur was hot," he said. " A little bird

whispered to me, and told me lies. I have done wrong; but my brother will forgive me."

"The heart of White Shield is warm. What did the little bird say to my brother?"

"Where is the white maiden?"

"With the Indians of the south—with the Arapahoes."

"Why is she there?"

The Indian proceeded to relate his adventures since he had parted from his friend.

He had gone to the peak which he had pointed out, and had waited there a while. Fearing that Silverspur had been killed, and that the Blackfeet might follow on the trail, he had judged it best—for the safety of Flora Robinette, which he supposed to be the chief consideration with his friend—to continue his flight toward the south, and he left an arrow to indicate that he had gone in that direction.

When night came on, he encamped, and waited for his friend. There could be no doubt that Wilder had wandered widely from the trail, as White Shield, when he considered himself out of danger from the pursuing Blackfeet, had searched for him in vain. Concluding that Silverspur had lost his life in the defense of the pass, the Indian had no alternative but to push on toward the rendezvous, to which his friend had promised to take the young lady. Flora was greatly grieved at the loss of her friend and deliverer, but made no other complaints, and went on bravely, trusting implicitly in her Blackfoot guide.

It was a long journey, the Indian said, and the young lady could not travel very rapidly. He guarded her as well as he was able to; but it was impossible to ride all day and watch all night. One night, when he had fallen asleep, he awoke to find himself surrounded by Indians. He discovered them before he was seen by them; but they were in such numbers that escape was impossible, and he and his charge were captured by them.

The captors were Arapahoes, who were on their way home, whither they carried their prisoners. White Shield was recognized as a Blackfoot brave who was responsible for the death of many of their warriors, and he was reserved for the torture. He succeeded in escaping, and set out, without food

or weapons, toward Robinette's rendezvous, where he hoped to find Silverspur. He had experienced great sufferings and privations, and had eaten nothing but roots for three days previous to meeting his friend.

Wilder could not control his emotion at this recital.

"Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that I was on the point of shooting you, after you had endured so much for me? You must be starving, and I have been with you nearly an hour, without offering you a morsel to eat!"

He opened his haversack, and spread its contents before his half-famished friend, who devoured them greedily. He gave the Indian his pipe to smoke while he rested, and then forced him to mount his horse, and walked by his side to the rendezvous.

Wilder persuaded White Shield to remain at the rendezvous until his strength was recruited, and furnished him, in the mean time, with a full outfit of clothing, weapons, ammunition and horses. The Indian appeared to be even more anxious than Wilder to recover Flora Robinette from the Arapahoes, and they soon set out in search of her, without informing any one of their purpose.

The young lady was still among the Arapahoes, and that was all that White Shield could say upon the subject with certainty. He had not seen her while he was among them, but did not doubt that she was safe, nor did he believe that she had suffered any harm.

Wilder and his friend crossed the mountains at the South Pass, and struck out in a southerly direction. After passing the Republican Fork of the Platte, they found themselves in the heart of the country claimed by the Arapahoes.

White Shield took his companion in a direct course to the village to which he had been carried as a prisoner, but discovered, upon his arrival at the place where it had stood, that it had recently been removed. Following the lodge-pole trail, which was plain enough, they found the village in its new location, near the base of the mountains.

At nightfall the two friends prepared to reconnoiter, for the purpose of discovering the whereabouts of Flora Robinette. It was arranged that White Shield should disguise himself and enter the village, where he should saunter about

and mix with the Arapahoes as much as possible, while Silverspur remained and awaited his return, at the place where their horses were concealed.

The Indian threw his blanket over his head, and walked boldly toward the village, leaving Wilder to wait and watch. The night was dark, quite favorable to the purposes of the spy, and Wilder had no doubt that he would soon see him returning in safety, whether he made any discovery or not. But hours passed away; the night grew darker, until it was so black that the outlines of the neighboring trees could scarcely be discerned, and the young man became anxious and impatient. Notwithstanding White Shield's experience and reputation as a woodman and warrior, it was possible that he might have lost his way in endeavoring to return to his friend, or that he might have been discovered and captured by the Arapahoes.

At last Wilder heard a rustling in the timber. He bent forward and listened, striving to look through the darkness, but not doubting that it was his friend who was approaching.

The noise ceased, and again it commenced; but it did not seem to draw any nearer. It might be some animal scratching among the leaves, or it might be White Shield feeling his way in the darkness. Wilder thought it best to try to find out what it really was.

"Is that you, White Shield?" he asked, in a whisper.

In reply, he was startled by the growling of an Indian dog, and the next instant the animal came running up to him, barking most vociferously.

"Confound this noisy little pest!" he exclaimed. "I must put a stop to his racket, or he will bring the red-skins on me."

He aimed a blow at the brute with the butt of his rifle, but missed it, and the dog ran toward the village, and then ran back, barking as spitefully and as loud as it could.

Wilder knew well that he would be compelled to change his location; but he greatly disliked to do so before the return of White Shield, as they would then be separated, and might not be able to come together again. He had no doubt that the noise would be heard at the village, and that the Indians, knowing from the dog's manner of barking that it had

not started any game, would sally out to see what was the matter. In that event he would be compelled to fly; but he hoped that White Shield might arrive before that step should become necessary.

Soon he heard steps approaching, and an Indian speaking to the dog.

"It is only one," thought Wilder, and he decided that he could easily put that one out of the way, and might then wait a little longer for his friend. He concealed himself, therefore, behind the trunk of a large tree, confident that the dog would bring the Indian to him.

So it happened. The Indian followed the dog to the tree, which he approached, cautiously at first, and then boldly, having convinced himself that the dog had only discovered some animal, which had taken refuge there. As soon as he was near enough, Wilder stepped out, and struck at him with his knife.

In the darkness the blow was badly aimed. It made a mortal wound; but the Arapaho had strength enough before he fell to slinch his adversary, and to utter a piercing yell. Wilder hastened to give him his death-blow; but the mischief was done, and the dog ran toward the village, barking more violently than ever.

It was time to be gone. With a muttered imprecation on his bad luck and on the miserable dog, Wilder hastened to his horse, cast loose the halter, and sprung upon his back. He was none too soon. Already the air resounded with the shouts of the Arapahoes, and he could hear them hastening through the forest toward the point from which the yells had proceeded. He spurred his horse and rode rapidly away from the voices, with the villainous dog close at his heels.

The timber was so close, the darkness was so dense, and the overhanging boughs were so troublesome, that Wilder did not make such progress as he wished to make, and he knew that his pursuers were gaining on him. The dog would keep them on the trail, in spite of the darkness, and it was evident that they must overtake him, unless fortune should favor him in some way.

It was with great joy, therefore, that he emerged from the forest, and found himself on a level plain, unbroken by tree

or shrub. The dog was still barking at his heels; but he felt that he could now easily distance his pursuers, and with a shout of triumph, he gave his horse the spur, and galloped furiously away.

He had kept up this headlong pace but a few minutes, when his horse suddenly stopped, with his fore feet planted on the verge of a precipice, and stood still as a stone, trembling all over with fear.

Wilder, carried on by the momentum which he had acquired from the rapid motion of his horse, did not participate in this sudden stoppage, but was thrown violently forward over the head of the animal. He felt himself falling swiftly through the air; then his breath left him, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

GEORGE BENNING thought himself compelled to remain with the Crows until he could learn the intentions of Bad Eye, their chief. He was confident that the Blackfeet warriors would return from their pursuit with Flora Robinette, if not with Silverspur and his red companion. He must look for Flora among them, and, as he could not expect to effect any thing alone, he was obliged to seek the aid of the Crows.

Bad Eye expressed, and appeared to feel, a great interest in Benning's enterprise, but was in no haste to afford him such aid as he desired. He frequently declared his belief that Silverspur (whose name had become really hateful to George Benning) would not fail to accomplish any thing that he undertook, and that the girl was probably safe, if she had not been carried to her friends. But the scalp of the white-haired chief, he said, should not dry in the lodges of the Blackfeet, and sooner or later he would wrest that trophy from them.

Although this promise had been often made, the chief seemed to be in no hurry to keep it, and Benning, discouraged and

out of patience, had resolved to leave the village, when Bad Eye at last yielded to his importunities. A war-party was dispatched to the Blackfoot village, with orders to attack if a fair opportunity should present itself. One of the first of the Crow warriors headed the expedition, and Benning accompanied it as a volunteer.

The Blackfoot village was found to be deserted, its occupants having removed further to the north. The Crows followed the trail, and discovered that the village had been united with another, and that the combined force was too formidable to justify an attack. After hovering a few days in the vicinity, during which time they captured some Blackfeet women, and ran off some horses, the Crows returned to their own village, to avoid reprisals from their enemies.

The chief and George Benning questioned the prisoners, and learned from them that the former had been correct in his surmises concerning the escape of Silverspur and the safety of Flora Robinette. Their warriors had returned from the pursuit, the women said, after suffering great losses. They had followed the fugitives into the mountains, and had nearly overtaken them, when they were stopped at a narrow pass, which was obstinately defended by Silverspur. They were at last obliged to send a party around to turn his position, when he had decamped. They then followed the trail a considerable distance, but at last gave up the pursuit in despair, and returned to mourn their losses. As for the scalp of the white-haired chief, they had danced over it; but it was not drying in any Blackfoot lodge. It had disappeared; no one knew what had become of it, and the heart of Good Ax was very hot.

Thoroughly convinced that Silverspur had accomplished the object upon which his own heart had been set, and grieved that he had uselessly spent so much time among the Crows, Benning decided to set out at once to join Flora. Whatever his feelings toward Wilder might be, he could not doubt that Flora had requested him to convey her to the place which her father had appointed as a rendezvous, and that he would faithfully obey her request. Benning had no fear that his supposed rival would act toward Flora otherwise than as a gentleman and a true friend; but therein lay the peril of his

own hopes. Wilder was so evidently a gentleman, and had had such a splendid opportunity to prove himself a friend ! Flora could not fail to be touched by his chivalry and devotion, and, if he should press his suit, it was not to be supposed that she could have the heart to refuse him, especially as Benning had never declared his love.

In this mood the young partisan had bid farewell to Bad Eye, and was about to leave the country of the Crows, when there was an arrival at the village, the new-comers being Mr. Martin Laurie and a band of trappers.

Benning was greatly surprised to see the agent at that time and place, and Laurie was no less surprised at meeting the partisan.

"I was afraid you were dead," said the Scotchman. "I heard nothing of you, and all of us supposed that you had been rubbed out by the red-skins."

"Not yet," coolly replied Benning, who was suspicious of the Scotchman, and felt unwilling to give him any information until he could learn what his intentions were.

"Have you been able to do any thing for Miss Flora?"

"Nothing at all."

Laurie, to whom Flora had now become a secondary object to the possession of her father's scalp, here dropped the subject, which he found Benning quite willing to avoid. He was shrewd enough to guess that the young partisan would not be so cool and unexcited about the matter, unless he knew that Flora was safe. If she was safe, and Benning was remaining quietly among the Crows, it was reasonable to suppose that the young lady was not far off. Laurie had as yet heard nothing to move him from the belief that a party of Crows had made the night-attack upon Mr. Robinette's encampment, and he was still convinced that Flora was to be found among them. Benning doubtless knew where she was; but he was not rich enough to buy her from them, or influential enough to insure them immunity for the outrage. If the Crows had Flora, it was probable that they also had the scalp of Paul Robinette. The way seemed clear to Martin Laurie, who soon left the young man, and hastened to the lodge of the chief, for the purpose of opening negotiations.

George Benning had been led to quite different conclusions,

which were as groundless as those of Laurie. When we reason upon false premises, the reasoning can not fail to deceive. Convinced that Silverspur had taken Flora to the rendezvous, he saw, from the light and easy manner in which Laurie mentioned her, that he knew of her safety and had seen her. It was evident to him that the shrewd Scotchman wished him to remain ignorant of her rescue, in order that he might be kept away from her as long as possible. He could not help smiling at the shortsightedness of Laurie, in expecting to conceal the truth from him, when he could so easily learn it from the trappers whom he had brought from the rendezvous.

He went among them to satisfy himself, but was doomed to disappointment. None of the men who came with Laurie had been at the rendezvous while Silverspur was there, and they knew nothing about him. Consequently they were unable to understand the hints which Benning (not wishing to ask openly about Flora) threw out concerning that person.

At last he was compelled to ask them openly whether Flora had reached the rendezvous, and the answers that he received were decidedly in the negative. None had seen her, none knew any thing about her, and all were sure that Laurie was as ignorant as themselves.

Benning could not help believing the statements of the trappers, except so far as they related to Laurie's ignorance, on which point he reserved a doubt. Whatever he might think of Silverspur, he was sure that he was not a man whom Martin Laurie could buy. It was possible, however, that the Scotchman might have convinced him of the justness of his claim upon Flora, and that Silverspur had given her up, in which case Laurie had concealed her for purposes of his own. Filled with this thought, the young man hastened to seek Laurie, and met him as he was coming out of the chief's lodge, looking crestfallen and indignant.

As both were angry, they gave utterance to their thoughts with less coolness than had marked their first interview.

"I think we had better have an understanding, Mr. Benning," said Laurie.

"I have come here for the purpose of having an under-

standing with you. I want to know what crooked purpose has brought you to this place."

"Don't be angry, my young friend. It will be to your interest to keep on the right side of me, and I am sure that you will gain nothing by flying into a passion. I don't know why you should impute crooked purposes to me."

"I supposed, from the way you spoke about Miss Robinette, that she was safe at the rendezvous."

"I don't know how she should have got there. I supposed, from your manner of speaking, that she was safe here, among the Crows; but the old chief tells me that she has not been here. He says that none of his people have ever attacked any party of white men, and that no white scalps have been brought into the village."

"Did he tell you nothing more?" asked Benning, as the Scotchman paused.

"He said that he had learned that they were Blackfeet who made the attack upon our camp, and that he had no doubt that Miss Flora had been carried off by them."

"Was that all?"

"That was all. I am afraid that the old rascal has been lying to me. Can you tell me whether he spoke the truth?"

"I suppose he did," replied Benning, wondering at the reticence of Bad Eye. "He ought to know whether his own people are clear."

"He may know, but may be unwilling to speak the truth. Come, Benning; I am convinced that you know more about this matter than you are ready to tell. We are in the same boat, and you will lose nothing by rowing with me. Do you know any thing about Miss Flora?"

"First answer me a question or two, and then I will tell you what I know."

"Shoot them out."

"Will you promise to answer them truly?"

"I will, so help me God!"

"Do you know a man named Fred Wilder, whom the Indians call Silverspur?"

"Yes."

"Has he been at the rendezvous lately?"

"Yes."

"Did he not bring Miss Flora with him?"

"Miss Flora? No, indeed. Why do you ask such a question?"

"Did he say nothing about her?"

"Nothing at all. He remained with us a few days, and then went away with a stray Indian."

"Of what tribe was the Indian?"

"I think he was a Blackfoot."

"It is plain enough now. I feared as much. We have both been cheated, and Silverspur has carried off the prize."

Benning then related his own adventures, and what he knew of those of Flora, winding up his account by declaring that he had had no doubt that the young lady had arrived safely at the rendezvous, until Laurie had convinced him to the contrary. Both agreed in thinking it very strange that Wilder had not spoken of Flora at the rendezvous, and could only attribute his silence to the intention of foul play.

"The old chief told me the truth, then," remarked Laurie, "and the Blackfeet were the rascals who stampeded our camp. Do you think it likely that that young chap, when he stole Miss Flora away from them, would also have carried off the old man's scalp?"

"Of course not. That is a strange question to ask."

"To tell you the truth, Benning, I am interested in obtaining that scalp. If you can manage to get it for me, by trading or in any other way, I will resign my claim to Flora in your favor."

"Of what use can the scalp be to you?" asked Benning, thinking that the agent had suddenly become very generous.

"If you had known Paul Robinette as well as I knew him, you would have known that he had some very queer points. One of his queer points was the fear that he would be scalped. He could not bear to think that his scalp should dry in an Indian lodge. He made me promise him most solemnly that if he should be killed, I would recover his scalp, and he gave me three thousand dollars as a fund to be applied to that purpose. I have no need of the money, but I am a man of my word, George Benning, and I will gladly transfer the amount to you if you will carry out the wish of my old friend, and will deliver the scalp to me. As for Flora,

I don't suppose that I am giving you much in that quarter. The desire of her father would weigh with her, no doubt, and I have told you what that was ; but the young are not likely to mate with the old."

"Nor the eagle with the buzzard," thought Benning ; but he did not put his thought into words. It seemed to him that the Scotchman was rather too generous, and he was silent, wondering what motive had urged this strange proposition.

As he stood there, looking at Laurie, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. He turned, and was confronted by the Crow chief.

"I have heard the talk of my white friends," he said. "They seem to think that Silverspur is a bad man ; but I know him. The sun may rise in the west some day. When it does so, I may believe that the ways of Silverspur are crooked ; but not until then. In what direction did he go, after leaving the rendezvous ?"

"I heard that he recrossed the mountains by way of the South Pass," replied Laurie. "He was seen traveling toward the south."

"To the country of the Cheyennes, or the Araphoes, or perhaps further. Wherever he is, he can be found. Bad Eye has said that the scalp of the white-haired chief shall not remain in a Blackfoot lodge, and the words of Bad Eye are not wind. Let my young friend stay with me. As for you, Red Hair, your tongue is not straight, and your talk does not please me."

Martin Laurie, rebuffed by the Crow chief, left the village in high dudgeon, and George Benning remained, waiting impatiently for the development of Bad Eye's intentions.

CHAPTER XI

DOVE-EYE.

FRED WILDER, after his involuntary leap, remained a long time insensible. When he awoke, he thought that he might as well have remained insensible. It was so dark that he could not see what sort of a place he was in. If he had seen, he could not have explored it, as he soon discovered that he was unable to move. He knew that his left leg was broken, and he feared that his left arm was as badly injured. He felt bruised and sore all over; but that was nothing; the wonder was that he was alive.

As he could not get away, he tried to resign himself to his situation; but the more he reflected upon it, the less resigned he became. The Indians, believing that he had been killed by the fall, would surely come to seek him as soon as it was light, and it would be impossible for him to escape. All his peril and suffering would be for nothing, as he would at last fall into their hands an unresisting victim.

Hours of darkness must have an end. Light will come, though suffering does not cease. Daylight came to Fred Wilder; but he could not feel that he ought to be thankful for it, as it would bring his enemies in search of him. It enabled him to see the location into which his lot and his body had fallen.

On one side was a precipice, so lofty that he shuddered as he thought of his fearful fall from its brink. Just around him was a green and grassy spot, upon the soft turf of which he had fallen. The grass stretched toward the east, until it melted into the prairie. In all other directions were ragged and rocky hills, beyond which towered grand mountain ranges.

It was near the head of a ravine that the young man had fallen. A crystal spring bubbled up near him, and its plentiful waters formed a little stream, that ran laughing down the ravine. By the side of the stream, a few steps from the wounded man, lay the body of the Indian dog that had been

the cause of his trouble. Wilder smiled grimly as he looked at the dead animal.

"You are dead, then, you miserable little wretch," he said. "There must be what my old tutor used to call a providential dispensation in this. I, who was the heaviest, have fallen upon a soft spot, and am alive. You, who were the lightest and the most likely to survive the fall, struck your head upon a stone, and dashed out your wretched brains. It follows that you were in the wrong, and I was in the right. Your death is a judgment upon you, for having given me an overdose of bark. Ah, well! I ought not to exult over you, as my fix will be worse than yours."

Having seen all that was within the range of his vision, Wilder had nothing to do but to make himself as easy as possible, and to wait for the coming of the Indians. This was unpleasant occupation, and he soon fretted himself into such a weak and feverish state, that he fainted.

When he again opened his eyes, a rare vision greeted them. By his side stood an Indian girl, who seemed to him, at that moment, the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

Her features were perfect, and her complexion was a delicate brunette, very different from that of any forest maiden he had yet seen. She had not the high cheek-bones peculiar to the aboriginal race, and her nose was decidedly of the Grecian order. Her hair, too, though black as the raven's wing, was wavy, with a strong inclination to curl. Her lips were rosy and rich, and there was an evident dimple on her chin; but her large brown eyes, as they were opened to their widest, with an expression of amazement and compassion, were to Wilder her most wonderful feature.

He ran over these particulars with an artistic eye; but he had only an instant to observe them, as the girl uttered a little startled scream when he looked up at her, and turned to fly.

He called to her, in the Dahcotah dialect, as loudly as his weak state would permit him to call; but his voice was very feeble. She stopped, and after a little hesitation, came to him.

"I am wounded," he said. "I fell from the top of that cliff last night, and am badly hurt. I can not move."

This appeal was sufficient to excite the sympathy of the girl. Telling Wilder that she would soon return, she hastened away

Within half an hour—though it seemed much longer to Wilder, who was anxious to see her again, and who feared that the Indians might arrive before she returned—she came back, accompanied by two men. One of these was a negro, and the other was an old Indian, whose hair was as white as snow, and whose face and arms and garments were painted with strange devices.

They brought with them a sort of litter, upon which the wounded man was laid very carefully and tenderly. The negro carrying one end of the litter, and the old man and the girl the other, they ascended a steep hill, and, after winding in and out among the rocks, came to a lodge, made of skins stretched upon poles, at the foot of the cliff. They entered the lodge, and Wilder saw nothing more. His rough journey had exhausted him, and he fainted.

When he again awoke, he found himself in a dark apartment, lying upon a couch of furs. From what the darkness permitted him to see, he judged that the apartment was a cavern, or a portion of a cavern; but he was not able to form any opinion of its shape or size.

He heard voices near him, which he believed to be those of the old Indian and the girl; but he could see no one, and he concluded that they were in another room. They were talking in the Indian tongue, of which he understood enough to enable him to follow their conversation.

“It shall be as you say, my child,” said the old man; “but if I do this thing, you must promise me that you will not leave me while I live.”

“You know that I have no wish to leave you, my father; but I will promise; only save the life of this white man. It must be him whom the warriors were chasing last night, when there was such a noise in the direction of the village. He was nearly killed by the fall from that cliff.”

“I will dress his wounds, and we will take care of him.”

“But the warriors will seek for him this morning. They will go to the spot where we found him, to see his body and to take his scalp. Not finding him there, they will follow our trail, and will come here.”

“It is true. He must be hid.”

“But where can he be hid? He is too weak to be moved.”

"He shall remain where he is, in the sacred room, which the warriors never enter. I will tell them that the white man was killed by his fall, and that I have buried him. I found a scalp upon him, which I will give to the warriors, and I will tell them that it is his scalp."

The old man drew from the breast of his robe the scalp of Paul Robinette, and showed it to the girl, who shuddered as she looked at it.

"But that is a gray scalp," she said, "and this is a young man."

"The warriors had not seen him, José tells me, and they do not know whether he is young or old."

"But this is not a fresh scalp. It is old, and the warriors will know that they are imposed upon."

"I will tell them that I have dried it, and they will believe me."

"They always believe you. I now believe that the young man will be safe. Do you think that he took that scalp—that he killed the man to whom it belonged?"

"Why not?"

"He looks too good to take scalps."

"I am afraid that it is because of his looks that Dove-eye wishes to save his life."

"Listen, my father! The warriors are coming."

When the question of the gray scalp was brought up, Wilder felt a very lively interest in the conversation. The possession of that article seemed to him, at the moment, of more importance than the preservation of his life. He was about to speak to his red friends and to demand the restoration of the trophy, when the announcement that the warriors were coming compelled him to hold his peace.

The announcement was immediately followed by the arrival of a large party of Indians, whom he could easily hear as they entered the lodge, talking volubly in their own tongue. A curtain of skins was let fall over the opening of the apartment in which he lay, and he was left in total darkness.

Darkness was favorable to meditation, and he soon convinced himself that it was for the best to let the scalp go. If the hair of Paul Robinette could save his own, that was probably the best use it could be put to. Besides, if the

Indians should discover him, they would take his own scalp and that of the old trader, and he would be none the better off for having kept it.

A great jabbering was kept up in the outer room for a while; but the warriors seemed to be satisfied, as they soon left, and the man and the girl came to his couch.

After a little conversation, in which Wilder informed his friends that he had overheard their plan for saving his life, and thanked them for their successful efforts, the old Indian sent away the girl, and called in the negro. An examination of Wilder's wounds was then made, and the old man, to his great astonishment, set the broken limb in very good style. His leg was properly bandaged, his bruises were attended to, and he soon felt quite comfortable. His situation was so much better than it had been at night, when he was lying on the ground alone, in pain, and in expectation of death at the hands of merciless savages, that he felt that he could desire nothing more, except the company of the beautiful Indian girl.

She soon came, and another came with her. The room was so dark that Wilder could not see her face or that of her companion; but he was sure that the latter was a woman.

"Perhaps he is sleeping, and we had better not disturb him," said Dove-eye, as she came in.

"Oh no! I must see him and speak to him."

Surely Wilder knew that voice. There was no mistaking its low, but clear and melodious tones.

"Flora! Miss Robinette!" he exclaimed. "Can it be you?"

"And who are you, sir? Is it Mr. Wilder?"

"It is what is left of him."

"You are badly wounded. Perhaps it was in trying to assist me that you were injured. Let me have some light, Dove-eye. I must see him."

"My sister knows him," said the Indian girl. "Perhaps she loves him."

"He has been very good to me, Dove-eye; but he is no lover of mine."

The curtain was removed from the opening, and Wilder was able to distinguish the faces of his friends, who seated

themselves at his side. Flora Robinette expressed the deepest sympathy when he related the manner in which he had been injured, and was hardly less anxious concerning White Shield. In response to his questions, she gave an account of her adventures since she had parted from him in the mountains. The Arapahoes had brought her to their village, where she had been seen by Dove-eye, who had taken such a fancy to her, that she had begged the old medicine-man to bring her to his lodge. As he was easily persuaded by her, and as his influence was great in the tribe, the request was granted, and Flora had since been the constant companion of Dove-eye. A warm affection had sprung up between the two, and Flora, although a captive, had become somewhat reconciled to her captivity, as she was happy in the friendship of the Indian girl.

Wilder, whose thoughts and eyes had been wandering to Dove-eye while Flora was speaking, thanked her for her kindness, and could not avoid calling to Flora's remembrance an expression which he had used in conversation with her.

"Do you remember that I said to you, that if you happened to have a sister, and she happened to be as beautiful as yourself, and a little older, and not quite so highly civilized, I might fancy her? If Dove-eye was your sister, my words would now be verified."

"But we are sisters; are we not, Dove-eye?" said Flora, taking the hand of her companion.

"We are sisters," replied the Indian girl, looking down and blushing.

CHAPTER XII.

A BLIND TRAIL.

WHITE SHIELD joined the Arapahoes in the chase of Silver-spur.

With the Blackfoot paint washed from his face, and with his blanket over his head, he had entered the village, and had had no difficulty in going where he pleased, and making such

examinations as he wished to make. He mingled with the Arapahoes on the street of the village, entered some of their lodges, and even conversed with them. But he did not find Flora Robinette, nor did he see or hear any thing to lead him to suppose that she was still among the Arapahoes.

Desiring to make his search as thorough as possible, he remained longer than he had expected to when he parted from Silverspur. The barking of the dog made him anxious concerning his friend, and presented him at the same time, as he thought, a good opportunity to get clear of the village.

"That is my dog," he said, as some of the warriors began to show signs of uneasiness at the continued barking of the animal. "I will go and see what is the matter with him."

This expression, by which the Blackfoot hoped to cover his friend, nearly brought him into trouble. It so happened that there was only one dog in the village, and that its owner was standing by when White Shield spoke. This Indian turned upon him angrily, and he could only avoid the consequences of his damaging remark by passing it off as a joke. The owner of the dog went to look for the animal, and White Shield sidled away from the group of Indians who had begun to suspect him.

Shortly there came from the forest a yell, piercing and full of anguish, that was at once recognized as the death-cry of the man who had gone to the dog.

The savages bounded away to avenge the death of their comrade, and White Shield joined them, hoping to get clear himself, if he could do nothing to aid his friend. Although several of the warriors were ahead of him, he soon perceived that Silverspur had mounted his horse, and was rapidly flying from his pursuers.

Believing that his friend on horseback could easily distance the Indians on foot, he thought it best to look to his own safety.

In their eager pursuit the Arapahoes had passed the place from which Silverspur had started, and where the horse of the Blackfoot was still concealed. Profiting by their negligence, White Shield lingered behind until all had passed him. He then untethered his horse, and quietly led him away until he was out of hearing of the Arapahoes, when he mounted, and rode off into the prairie, where he hoped to find his friend.

When he believed himself to be at a safe distance, he halted and listened anxiously; but he heard nothing of the wild triumphant yell that would have announced the death or capture of the fugitive. Concluding, therefore, that Silverspur had escaped, he rode about until daylight, expecting to meet him. In this he was disappointed, as he could not find even a trail. He at last perceived that it would be necessary to commence the search at the beginning—to start at the place from which Silverspur had started.

He concealed his horse, and went to the spot where he had left Silverspur the night before. It was easy to track the fugitive by the footprints of his horse, and White Shield followed them through the forest and over a piece of level ground beyond, until they abruptly terminated at the edge of a precipice.

The Blackfoot looked over the precipice, and saw that it was a fearful leap to the bottom. It was not to be supposed that a man could take such a leap and live. He was forced to the conclusion that Silverspur had taken this leap in the dark, and had been killed.

By a circuitous route White Shield reached the ravine at the foot of the bluff, and there saw abundant evidence of the truth of his surmise. There were spots of blood upon the stones, and an indentation of the turf showed that a heavy body had fallen upon it. There were many footprints in the vicinity, and a trail led up one of the hills that surrounded the ravine. The Arapahoes had carried away the body, no doubt, and their silence the previous night was occasioned by the fact that they had not then descended into the ravine to search for their victim.

White Shield did not follow the trail that led up the hill, as he supposed that it only went around to the village. It was possible that his friend might still be living, though terribly mangled. If he was dead, it would be some satisfaction to recover his scalp from his enemies. To this purpose White Shield now devoted himself.

After dark he went to the Arapaho village, and prowled about their lodges, confident that there would be some sort of a celebration over their victory, if the death of Silverspur could be so regarded. He was not mistaken. Bonfires were

blazing, and preparations were being made for a grand jubilee, which soon commenced.

Near the largest bonfire was a pole, from which a single scalp was hanging. Around this men and women, mingled together, danced and sung, and every now and then, at the tap of a drum, one of the warriors would step forward and recount his exploits.

White Shield did not long witness this scene from concealment. He felt sure that Silverspur was dead, and that the Arapahoes were rejoicing over his scalp. This awakened in him a desire to snatch the trophy from their possession, and to take vengeance upon them for the death of his friend. He was just in the mood for such an achievement. He had deserted his tribe, Silverspur was gone, and there would be no one to mourn for him if he should fall. In fact, he was desperate, ready at any moment to sing his death-song and pass to the spirit-land.

He threw his blanket over his head, and mingled with the Indians of the village. He was not foolhardy enough to join the dance; but he forced his way into the circle, and walked up to the pole from which the scalp was hanging.

To his great surprise he perceived that the scalp was dry, as if it had long hung in the smoke of a lodge. The hair, moreover, was thin and gray, almost white. White Shield had never heard any of those tales of civilized men whose hair has suddenly turned gray from the effect of terrible fright or severe suffering. If he had read them, he would not for a moment have believed that any thing could change the long and waving masses of Silverspur's brown hair to those thin gray threads.

It was not Silverspur's scalp. His friend was living; or, if he was dead, the Arapahoes had not been able to outrage his remains. White Shield was no longer desperate. He had an object to live for, and his caution returned to him. His entrance into the circle, his examination of the gray scalp, and the train of thought which followed from that examination, had occupied only a few moments of time; but he felt that he was in a dangerous position, from which he would find it difficult to extricate himself.

The warriors were already scrutinizing him, with glances

full of suspicion. If he should step out as he had come in, he would be followed and questioned, and it would soon be discovered that he was a stranger and an enemy. He might run for his life ; but his chances of escape would be very poor, and, if he should succeed, the Arapahoes would be put on their guard against his subsequent movements.

His resolution was as audacious as it was sudden. At the tap of the drum he threw off his blanket, and stepped forward

"Arapahoes !" he exclaimed, "do you remember that, at the last season of the falling leaf, you lost a tall warrior at the Black Fork of the Platte ? He was very strong, and a great brave. I killed him."

"We remember," responded some of the Arapahoes, looking up at the speaker in surprise.

White Shield proceeded to mention other Arapahoes who had fallen by his hand, and the same response followed each narration. At the fifth, which filled the number allowed to each relator, a warrior started up.

"Are you speaking the truth ?" he said. "It was White Shield, a great brave of the Blackfeet, who killed Red Bear."

"I am White Shield," replied the Blackfoot. "I am a warrior, as you know, and a great brave. I have left the Blackfeet, and they would kill me if they should see me. I have come to the Arapahoes, who are great warriors, to make them my brothers, and to fight for them. Do you want me, Arapahoes ? If you do, I will stay with you. If not, I am ready to sing my death-song and go to the spirit-land."

The audacious warrior had not to wait a moment for a response. The Arapahoes thronged about him tumultuously, embracing him, and covering him with presents.

His initiation into the tribe was completed ; but it must be confessed that he did not intend to remain an Arapaho. He had joined them for the purpose of saving his own scalp and rendering assistance to his friend. Further than this he did not then look.

He soon made inquiries concerning the scalp which had been the occasion of the dance, and was told the story of the chase of an unknown white man who had been discovered by a dog, and who had been killed by a fall from a cliff.

White Shield was puzzled. The Arapahoes described the

pursuit of Silverspur; but the scalp was not his. Who had the old medicine-man buried, and whose scalp had he given to the warriors? Surely it could not be Silverspur. White Shield said nothing more concerning the scalp, but determined to investigate the matter quietly.

As soon as it was dusk he left the village, and went to the place where he had concealed his horse. The animal was safe; but the keen eye of the Blackfoot quickly detected signs of some presence besides his own. Somebody had been there during his absence, and, unless his penetration was greatly at fault, somebody was still concealed in the vicinity.

White Shield applied himself to find out who this somebody was. While he affected to busy himself about his horse, his bright eyes searched the forest, and took note of every tree, twig, leaf and blade of grass within the range of his vision. In the course of this searching investigation he saw another pair of eyes, twinkling from behind a leafy hedge of bushes. He was sure that those eyes belonged to a white man, and the white man could not be Silverspur, who would have recognized him and spoken to him. Any other white man was his enemy, and this one had been lying in wait for him.

The Blackfoot left the horse, and walked toward the thicket in which he had seen the eyes glisten. He walked slowly, looking about him upon the ground, as if searching for something he had lost. He passed the thicket, and then, with the quickness of lightning, turned and threw himself upon his concealed foe.

A brief struggle followed, in which both of the combatants came crashing out of the bushes, and fell upon the ground. But the red-man had the advantage of surprise—of the first attack—and he kept it. In a few seconds his enemy was under his knee, and his right hand was raised, ready to strike with his glittering knife. The white man closed his eyes, and muttered one word:

“Flora!”

The Indian started. His knife was lowered harmlessly, and the grasp of his left hand was relaxed. “Flora!”—he had heard the name used by Silverspur, and perhaps this white man might be a friend of her whom Silverspur called Flora

"Who are you?" he asked in plain English. "Who is Flora?"

A thought occurred to the white man. A hope dawned upon him, and his eyes brightened as they opened. This red-skin knew the name of Flora; he was a Blackfoot, as was evident from his paint and his garb; he was among the Arapahoes.

"Who are you?" asked the white man. "Are you the Blackfoot who went off with Silverspur?"

"I am. Are you a friend to Silverspur?"

"I am not his enemy. I am George Benning," replied the white man, who was not sure in what position he stood toward Silverspur.

"Let my brother rise. Silverspur is my brother, and his friends are my friends."

The two men, forgetting their late conflict, seated themselves amicably upon the ground, and conversed about the matters in which both were deeply interested. White Shield related all he knew of Flora and Silverspur, and enlightened the mind of Benning on some points that had been dark to him; but there was nothing to show him that Silverspur had or had not gained the love of Flora, and on this subject his anxiety was still intense.

The question was, what had become of Flora and Silverspur? Believing that two heads are better than one, and that his own was better than the Blackfoot's, Benning proposed to accompany White Shield to the place at which Fred Wilder was supposed to have been killed by falling from the cliff.

They went there, and made a careful examination of the locality; but Benning was obliged to admit that he was as much in the dark as the Indian was. It was unreasonable to suppose that a man could have fallen from such a height without being killed, and it was equally unreasonable to suppose that the gray scalp that had been exhibited among the Arapahoes had belonged to Silverspur. Both agreed that the only chance of solving the mystery lay in following the trail that led up the hill; but both agreed that it was useless to undertake the enterprise that night.

Benning then informed the Blackfoot that he had come with a band of Crow warriors, under the leadership of Bad Eye,

their chief, who were ready to aid him in any enterprise against the Arapahoes. They were encamped at a little distance to the northward, and he had come on in advance, to spy about the village of the Arapahoes.

White Shield was not entirely pleased with this communication, although he showed no signs of displeasure. The Crows were the enemies of his tribe, and the Arapahoes were now his friends. He was ready to shake off his allegiance to them if he might thus benefit Silverspur; but he was not willing to betray them to the Crows. He made no reply to Benning, except to protest against any hostile act before the whereabouts of Silverspur could be discovered.

On this point Benning was uncertain, as he feared that his own plans and those of the Blackfoot might run counter to each other. He said that the discovery must soon be made, if at all, as it would be impossible for the Crows to remain long in the vicinity without a conflict.

It was settled that they should commence the search together in the morning, and White Shield returned to the village, as he could not be absent from the Arapahoes the first night after his admission to the tribe. Benning concluded to remain where he was, as he could hide there as well as elsewhere, and would be at hand to take up the trail in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIGHT AHEAD.

FRED WILDER bore his captivity patiently; but this does not prove that he possessed the gift of patience in a very remarkable degree. Dove-eye was with him daily and hourly, and his admiration for the forest maiden had strengthened into a passion. His heart was enthralled in such a sweet captivity, that he took no thought of the captivity of his body.

He had not yet had time or occasion to think how this was to end. He had given himself no uneasiness concerning

the fate of White Shield; he had not attempted to form a plan for the release of Flora Robinette and her return to her friends; nor had he even guessed how he should take Dove-eye away from the Arapahoes, if she should be willing to leave them. Love, if not really a selfish feeling, is apt to crowd out other thoughts and feelings.

It is probable that he would not have related to Flora his adventures since she left him at the pass in the mountains, if she had not questioned him upon the subject. When he recounted the conversation which he had overheard between Martin Laurie and Jake Farnsworth, so many emotions were excited in Flora's bosom, that she at last burst into tears.

"Why need you be so greatly troubled about it?" asked Wilder, when she had wiped away her tears. "Those fellows can't hurt you."

"My father's scalp! To think that it should be made the price of my hand!"

"But you are not obliged to give your hand to the man who happens to recover the scalp."

"To think that he should be scalped, after having dreaded it all his life, and that his scalp should now be drying in some Blackfoot lodge. It is too horrible!"

"You are mistaken there. The scalp is not among the Blackfeet. I brought it with me when we left their village."

"You did?" exclaimed Flora, opening her eyes very wide.

"I did; but it does not follow that I am to marry you," replied Wilder, with a smile at Dove-eye.

"No; for the medicine-man took it from you, and gave it to the Arapaho warriors."

"You guessed right that time. I suppose you had rather George Benning had taken it from the Blackfeet; but he did not happen to be there, as I was. Your father's scalp has saved my scalp, and I am well rewarded for the freak of stealing the trophy from the Blackfeet—for it was nothing but a freak, you perceive, as I then knew nothing of the conditions of your father's will. As the matter now stands, you have a much better chance to recover the scalp than either George Benning or I."

"How so? What can I do?"

"I am disabled, as you see, and it may be many weeks

before I am able to walk. George Benning is searching for you, no doubt, if he is the man I take him to be ; but we don't know where he is, and it is very doubtful whether he is on the right trail. You alone are at liberty and able to act."

"What shall I do?"

"Persuade Dove-eye to get the scalp from the Arapahoes. The warriors have had their dance over it, no doubt, and it is a small matter to them now. She might ask for it as a curiosity. If they should not be willing to give it to her, she could soon find it hanging about somewhere, unnoticed, and there would be no excitement about it if it should be missed. I think she would gladly consent to get it for you, and then the trophy will be with you, to whom it rightfully belongs. When it is in your possession, I see nothing to hinder you from bestowing it, and the legacy that accompanies it, where you bestow your hand."

Dove-eye, who had understood a portion of the conversation, answered the appealing look of her friend with a smile. When Flora had fully explained the case to her, and had implored her aid in recovering the scalp, she at once consented, glad of an opportunity to serve her white sister.

"But I can do nothing for two or three suns," she said. "I can not go to the village now."

"Why not?" asked Flora, to whom the scalp had become precious, not only because it was her father's, but because her own fate was so nearly affected by it.

"Because I have so much to do here, that I can not get away. I must conceal both of you in some other place, as my father is going to the spirit-land, and this lodge will be full of warriors."

"What do you mean?" asked Wilder. "Is the old medicine-man so near dead? I had not known that he was sick."

"He is not sick. He goes to the spirit-land when he wishes to go, and the warriors come and look at him while he is dead, and go away. Then he comes back from the spirit-land, and they visit him again, when he tells them what he has seen and what will happen to them."

"What an imposture! Do you believe that he dies, Dove-eye?"

"He goes to the spirit-land. The warriors pinch him, and prick him, and are sure that he is dead."

"Very well done for a red-skin! When will he take leave of us?"

"To-morrow night he will go to the spirit-land, and the next morning the warriors will come to look at him. After that day I will do what my sister has asked me to do."

"And then, Miss Robinette," said Wilder, "you will be obliged to marry yourself, or give up half your fortune."

"I wish you would not speak of the matter so lightly," replied Flora. "Of what use will it be to me, if I am always to remain here? How can I ever escape?"

"That is a question for the future. For my part, I can do nothing until I am able to walk. I hope that a way will open for all of us."

Wilder looked meaningly at the Indian girl, who held down her head, and turned away.

The old medicine-man and the negro came in, at the request of Dove-eye, to remove Wilder to another place of concealment. There was another small cave, a short distance from that in front of which the lodge was built, to which the wounded man was carried, with the assistance of the girls. Dove-eye and Flora arranged a comfortable couch for him, and the medicine-man hung up before the entrance a dressed buffalo-skin, painted with strange devices, indicating that the place was sacred. Flora was told that she also must enter that cave when the warriors came from the village, and must remain there until the ceremonies were completed, but would be free, until that time, to go about as she had usually done.

The next morning Flora went early to the spring for water. The promise of Dove-eye, and the confident tone in which Fred Wilder spoke of the future, had given her hope, and her heart was light and cheerful for the first time in many weeks. She was singing as she descended the hill, so gayly that she did not hear her name pronounced in a low voice, and she started when the voice assumed a louder tone.

"Who is it?" she asked, as she stopped and looked around, not knowing whom to expect, unless it might be White Shield.

"A friend," was the answer, and a young man in hunter's costume stepped out into the path before her.

Joy and surprise were mingled in the exclamation which she uttered as she recognized George Benning. Fearing that she was about to faint, the young partisan stretched out his arms to keep her from falling; but she quickly recovered herself, and gave him her hand.

"Where did you come from, Captain Benning?" she asked. "How did you get here? Is any one with you?"

"You ask more questions than I can answer at a breath. I have been searching for you ever since you were lost."

"I did not know who it could be, when you spoke, unless it might be White Shield."

"Who is White Shield?"

"An Indian who helped me to escape from the Blackfoot village."

"I have seen him. He will be here presently. I was waiting for him when you came singing down the hill. Here he is."

White Shield rose up, as if from the earth, and presented himself before the young lady, who welcomed him like an old friend. The Blackfoot caused his friends to step aside into a sheltered nook, where mutual explanations were given, Flora declaring that she could only remain there a few moments, as search would be made for her if she should not soon return to the lodge.

"Why should you return?" asked Benning. "I have come to save you, to take you away. There is a large band of friendly Indians with me, and you have only to mount my horse and ride a short distance, when you will be in the camp, safe from the Arapahoes."

"Can you also save Mr. Wilder, and take him with you?"

"You are first to be considered. I can place you in safety and will then see what I can do for your friend."

Benning laid such an emphasis on the word "friend," that Flora noticed it.

"Mr. Wilder saved me from the Blackfeet," she said. "He came here to save me from the Arapahoes, and was badly wounded in the attempt, so that he is unable to move. Do you think I could desert him? There is another matter to be considered. My father's scalp is in the Arapaho village, and it is of the greatest importance to me that it be recovered from

them. If you wish really to serve me, can you not get possession of that relic?"

"God knows that I wish to serve you! The Crows are eager to fight, and will be glad of the opportunity; but there will be a battle, and I feared that you might be carried away during the struggle."

"There need be little or no danger. I have a plan, of which I think both you and White Shield will approve."

Flora then told her companions of the scene that was to be acted next morning, at the lodge on the cliff. She accurately described the situation and surroundings of the lodge, showing that there would be an excellent opportunity to lay an ambuscade, by which the Arapaho warriors could be attacked and routed as they left the lodge of the medicine-man. The victory would be an easy one, she thought, as the Arapahoes, being surprised and mostly unarmed, would be readily dispersed. Benning and his friends once in possession of the village, they might recover the gray scalp, and might at their leisure remove Wilder and herself, with Dove-eye, if she would accompany them.

Benning had listened with surprise when Flora spoke of her father's scalp, and remembered the anxiety which Martin Laurie expressed to obtain possession of that trophy. He fell in with her views the more readily, as she had given him some clue to the strange conduct of the Scotchman. He highly approved of her plan, and thought that there could be no possible difficulty in carrying it out.

White Shield also pricked up his ears when the gray scalp was mentioned. He was rejoiced to hear that Silverspur, although badly wounded, was alive and likely to live; but he was still puzzled concerning the scalp.

"The Arapahoes told me," said he, "that they were dancing over the scalp of Silverspur; but I knew they did not speak the truth."

Flora was obliged to tell him how her father's scalp had been brought from the Blackfoot village, and how it had saved the life of his friend. White Shield expressed his approval gutturally. If he had been a Yankee, he would have whistled; as he was an Indian, he grunted most emphatically.

It was necessary for Flora to hasten back to the lodge, lest

she should be missed. Assuring her friends that she would pray for their success, she ran away to tell the news to Fred Wilder.

White Shield wished to remain in the vicinity of the village, so that he could be near Silverspur; but Benning persuaded him to accompany him to the camp of the Crows, so that he might take part in the expected attack. It was for the benefit of Silverspur, Benning argued, and White Shield need trouble himself no further about the Arapahoes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AMBUSCADE.

FLORA was careful not to go near Dove-eye when she returned to the lodge on the cliff. She was so much excited at meeting Benning, that she knew her friend would notice her state of mind and inquire the cause, and she was by no means sure that it would be good policy to inform the Indian girl of the plot that had been laid to destroy her tribe.

She went, therefore, as quickly as possible, to the cave in which Fred Wilder was concealed, and astonished that young man by bursting in upon him suddenly.

"What is the matter, Miss Robinette?" he asked. "You look as if you had seen a ghost; but it must have been a pleasant one, to judge from your countenance."

She astonished him again, by running to the entrance, and peering out carefully, to see if any one was in sight or hearing, before she composed herself sufficiently to take a seat by his side and answer his question.

"I have not seen a ghost," she replied; "but I have seen a man. White Shield is alive and safe."

"That is nothing very wonderful. I was not afraid that the Arapahoes would rub out that red-skin, and I expected to hear from him before long. Is that all?"

"George Benning is here. I saw him this morning."

"Ah! That accounts for the milk in the cocoanut. No

wonder you are excited. What has he been doing this long time? Is he alone?"

"He has been searching for me, and he has a band of Crow warriors to back him, and we are all going to be released and carried home, and I have told him what to do."

"You would not be so confident of release, I suppose, unless you had told him what to do. Pray tell me what instructions you gave him."

Flora detailed the plan of the proposed ambuscade and attack upon the Arapahoes as they returned from their visit to the medicine-lodge. Wilder listened with a pleased countenance, but became grave at last.

"Very well planned!" he said. "No one could have hit upon a better idea. There is only one difficulty."

"What is that?"

"Dove-eye."

"I have not told her."

"No; and you must not. Of course it would not do to trust her with the plan of a campaign against her own people. My only fear is, that she will be killed in the *melée*, or will fly with the rest."

Flora's countenance fell. She had not thought of this.

"Could I not watch her?" she suggested.

"No. You must stay here with me; because such are your orders, and because you must keep out of danger. You would only run the risk of another captivity. It is very selfish in me, Miss Robinette; but I almost feel like wishing that this help had not come, and that we were not to be released. As it is, I am helpless, and must take my chances."

"Could I not give her a hint that you wished her to remain?"

"It would be impossible to do so without disclosing your design, and you must be very careful of your looks as well as your words, or she will guess it. Don't let my selfishness trouble you. You must know that I did not speak in earnest."

Flora left the little cave with a heavy heart. It went hard with her to give pain to the man who had rescued her from the Blackfeet, and who had always shown himself so kind and considerate. She had not thought of the possibility of being separated from Dove-eye, when she and Wilder should be

released, and the thought troubled her when it was forced upon her. Dove-eye would not then have guessed, from her joyful and excited manner, that she had received some very good tidings; on the contrary, she would have been likely to ask what had happened to make her so sad and woebegone. But the Indian girl was too much occupied in preparations for the morrow, to notice the changes in the demeanor of her friend.

The day passed off pretty much as usual, and at night the old medicine-man went into a trance. That is, he stretched himself out in state in the principal room of the lodge, and Dove-eye declared that he had gone to the spirit-land. José was sent to the village to inform the warriors that they might come and visit him, and Flora, after a tender leave-taking with Dove-eye, repaired to Wilder's cave.

She seated herself by the side of the invalid, and waited anxiously and impatiently for the issue of her plans. Wilder told her that a yell would be the signal of the onset, and both listened, eagerly and painfully, for the savage slogan.

Wilder said nothing more of his fears concerning the probable loss of Dove-eye, and Flora did not mention the subject. Both were too much absorbed in listening for the yell, which she longed but almost dreaded to hear. When it came, at last, their nerves had been so strained by their long suspense, that it fell upon them like a thunderbolt.

The Arapaho warriors had come from the village, in a long and solemn procession, to look upon their great medicine-man, who, as they firmly believed, had the power of going to the spirit-land and returning whenever he chose to do so—in other words, of dying and coming to life. George Benning and White Shield had stationed the band of Crows in a ravine near which the procession must pass, and the warriors from the north gazed from their hiding-place at their enemies, gloating over the rich prospect of scalps.

The Arapahoes entered the lodge on the cliff, and looked at the old medicine-man as he lay stretched out on his couch, with his eyes closed and his face of a ghastly color, to all appearance dead. As they defiled past him, they pulled his hair, they pinched him, they pricked him with their knives; but the figure lay cold and motionless, without sign of life, and they were satisfied that he was dead.

When all had seen him, they set out to return to the village in slow and solemn procession as they had come, leaving Dove-eye alone with the old man. As he usually lay in the trance until noon, and there was time enough, the girl thought that she might as well pay a visit to Flora and Wilder.

She took a parting look at the old man, and was about to leave the lodge, when she was startled by a shot from the valley below, followed by a series of wild and unearthly yells. Then came a volley of musket and rifle-shots, with screams of pain and rage, and shouts of triumph and vengeance.

She knew well what it meant. She knew that the Arapahoes had been attacked by a hostile tribe, and she stood irresolute, when the medicine-man, to her great surprise, leaped from his couch, and ran out at the door to see what was the matter.

Dove-eye followed him, and as they looked down into the valley, they stood aghast at the scene which presented itself to their astonished eyes. The Arapahoes, taken at a disadvantage, and mostly unarmed, had been seized with a panic that could not be checked. But few remained to fight, and these were rapidly falling under the weapons of their adversaries. The rest were flying, helter-skelter, in every direction, some up into the hills, some toward the village, and some into the recesses of the ravines, followed by the victorious Crows.

Among those who scampered up the hills was a tall and stalwart warrior, with blood streaming from his head and breast. As he came in sight of the old man and the girl, he warned them to fly, as his pursuers were close behind, and they turned and ran into the lodge.

The warrior did not follow them, but ran on until he came to the cave in which Flora Robinette and Fred Wilder were concealed. He must have known the place, for he went direct to the entrance, although it was hidden by bushes. The painted skin made him hesitate a moment; but he tore it aside and entered the cave.

Flora and Wilder were not a little startled at the sudden entrance of this bleeding and panting savage. The girl screamed, and stepped closer to the invalid, forgetting that he was even more helpless than herself. The Arapaho was also

astonished ; but the light of vengeance began to gleam in his wild eyes ; he could at least have the satisfaction of slaying a pale-face before he died.

Wilder, who divined his intention, put out his unbandaged arm, as if he would shield Flora from violence. At the same time he was cool enough to notice a gray scalp that hung from the Indian's waist-belt, and he was sure that he knew that scalp. How he longed, in that brief moment, to be free and strong again, instead of lying there, unable to move, compelled to submit to whatever fate the infuriated savage should choose to visit upon him and the almost equally helpless being at his side.

He had little time for reflection. The Arapaho sprung forward and seized the young lady, whom he dragged from the couch. Pulling back her head by the hair, he raised his knife, with threatening look and gesture. Flora sent forth scream upon scream, and Wilder, nearly beside himself with rage, shouted for help at the top of his voice.

The Indian's blow was never struck. A form came bounding into the little cave ; a tomahawk sunk, with a harsh, dull sound, into the skull of the Arapaho ; and Flora was lifted in the arms of George Benning. Behind the partisan came White Shield, who coolly proceeded to relieve the fallen warrior of his scalp.

Flora had fainted, and Benning's attention could not be withdrawn from her until she recovered her consciousness. Then he turned to the invalid, who had spoken to him.

"You were just in time, Benning," said Wilder. "I was helpless here, and the red-skin had it all his own way. You have not only saved the life of Miss Robinette, but have gained something else. Do you see a gray scalp in that fellow's belt ? Take it out and keep it as you would your life, for much depends upon it."

Benning obeyed, and looked at Flora as he did so.

"Is this the scalp you spoke to me about ?" he asked.

"I suppose so," she replied. "Mr. Wilder knows."

"Do you wish me to keep it ?"

"Yes, indeed — that is, it will be safer with you, I think."

"Why must it be kept ?"

"My father wished—indeed, I don't really know, but it must not be lost."

"I will take care of it. And now we must leave this place. The Arapahoes have been badly whipped, and are scattered over the country; but they will get together again, and they may give us trouble. You can't move, I see, Wilder, but you can be carried, no doubt."

Wilder looked at Flora, and muttered the name of Dove-eye.

"What does he mean?" asked Benning.

Flora told him, in a few words, about the Indian girl, and explained the reason of Wilder's anxiety concerning her.

"We will go and look for her," said Benning. "She can't be far away. You will be safe with me now, and White Shield can stay and take care of Silverspur."

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

GEORGE BENNING searched faithfully for Dove-eye. He was so glad to learn that he had not to fear Wilder as a rival, that he thought he could not do too much to help that young gentleman to the dusky maiden upon whom he had really set his heart.

But all their search was in vain. With Flora to guide him he ransacked the empty lodge, and hunted in every nook and crevice among the rocks. Flora made the hills echo with the name of her friend, and Benning pressed into the search all the Crows he met, but no trace could be found of Dove-eye or the old medicine-man.

Wilder knew, as soon as they entered the cave, that the Indian girl had not been found. The sorrowful countenance of Flora told him this, and he felt as one who has sustained a great loss.

"You need tell me nothing about it," he said. "I felt sure

that it would be so. She is lost, and here I am, on my back, more helpless than a child."

"You are not helpless while we are here to help you," replied Benning. "White Shield and I will do all that any man can do; but we can stay here no longer. The Crows are anxious to leave, and we will only have time to make a litter to carry you in."

"Never mind me. Leave me here. I am of no use to myself or any one else, and I may as well die here as elsewhere."

"You must go with us," protested Flora. "Do you suppose I could think of leaving you here to die—you, who saved me from the Blackfeet, and who have been so kind to me? You will soon get well if you go with us, and you would be sure to perish here."

"I have no wish to go. I had rather be left here. Dove-eye will return when you are gone, and I will see her."

Flora looked appealingly at White Shield.

"Silverspur must go," said the Blackfoot. "The Great Spirit has taken away his mind. We will carry him."

White Shield and Benning went out, and soon constructed a horse-litter, making a bed by stretching a blanket across the poles and piling furs upon it. They then procured the assistance of some Crows, to help them lift the invalid.

Wilder protested against the removal; but he was carried out, in spite of his protests, and placed in the litter, to which horses were hitched in front and rear, and the party set out to join the Crows, who were collecting together on the prairie beyond the mountain.

Flora wished to be taken to her father's old rendezvous on Green River, and Bad Eye was willing that the Crows should escort her to that place and encamp a while at the rendezvous. Wilder, as he had been brought against his will, had no choice but to accompany the rest. George Benning was bound to go where Flora went, and White Shield wished to be with Silverspur.

The Crows set off that evening in high glee. They had taken many scalps, and had captured numbers of horses, and were sure to meet with a grand reception at home. They were in strong force, too, and had no reason to fear any re-

verse on the way. Straggling parties of Arapahoes hung around them during the first four days, hoping to recover some of the horses that had been taken from them, but the Crows kept such a good guard, that they abandoned the attempt.

The journey was very pleasant to most of the travelers, and quite safe to all. George Benning had liberty and time enough to make Flora acquainted with the state of his feelings toward her, and he soon learned that she was not indifferent to him. In fact, before they had traveled many days together, he had asked her to allow him to be her protector through life, and she had granted the request.

Their happiness did not prevent the lovers from paying proper attention to Fred Wilder. His wounds were carefully dressed by Benning and the Crow chief, and Flora neglected no opportunity of providing for his comfort. White Shield was continually at the side of Silverspur, and Bad Eye was so evidently absorbed in Flora, that George Benning declared that he was almost inclined to be jealous of the old chief.

In due course of time they reached the rendezvous. The Crows encamped in the valley, and Bad Eye, with the Black-foot and his white friends, entered the inclosure that surrounded the post which had been erected at that place.

Martin Laurie was greatly surprised at the arrival of Flora in such company, and with such an escort; but he was very glad to see her, or pretended to be, and treated her with the greatest deference. In accordance with her wishes, he fitted up a room in the fort for Silverspur, and the wounded man was made as comfortable as possible. The Scotchman remained very obedient to Flora—servilely so, indeed—until he perceived her intimacy with Benning, and was informed of the relations that had been established between them. Then he thought it was time for him to drop the mask, and his demeanor became unbearably insolent, as if he desired a rupture with the daughter of his late employer. Benning wished to chastise him, but was withheld by Flora, who remembered her father's respect for the man.

The rupture soon came, nevertheless. He entered Silverspur's room, where the young lady was seated, with Benning and White Shield and the Crow chief. His behavior was so

overbearing, that she was forced to tell him that she had borne his insolence as long as she could, and must give him notice that he was no longer wanted there.

"I don't know that you have to say any thing about it, Miss," replied Laurie.

"Am I not my father's daughter?"

"I suppose you are; but that don't give you any say about his property. I am in trust here under the directions of Mr. Robinette, and I may have to continue in trust under the law. It is certain that you will have no right to the property until you marry, and it is very doubtful whether you will have any right to interfere with it then."

"I propose to marry."

"That fellow there? Very well. Under your father's will, half of his property will go to the man who recovers his scalp from the Indians, and you will have to marry that man, whoever he may be, or you will get nothing but the income of the other half. I am of the opinion that I will have to remain in charge here, under the law, until we hear from Paul Robinette's scalp."

"Here it is," said George Benning, unwrapping a cloth that he had taken from his breast, and showing the gray scalp.

Laurie started back in astonishment. He recognized the thin white hair of his late employer; but by what fatality had it come into the possession of George Benning?

"It is an imposition!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe it. How can you prove that that thing is genuine?"

"I can prove it," said Fred Wilder.

"I may as well tell you, Mr. Laurie," said Flora, "that your conversation with Farnsworth, when he told you the provisions of my father's will, was overheard. The revelations that were then made have placed us in the position we now occupy. I suppose you will no longer object to my having a voice in the management of my father's property."

"If there should be any objection, I can quiet it," said Bad Eye, speaking in very good English. "As the nearest living relative of this young lady, I am her natural guardian."

All looked at the Crow chief in surprise, and Flora begged him to explain.

"It would be a long story, if I should tell it all, and I will be content with a few words. I am William Robinette. I was in business with my brother, in my younger days; but he always hated me and persecuted me. After he married, he drove me away, appropriating my share of the business. I determined to be revenged upon him. When I left the country, I took with me his first-born child, a daughter, who, if she were alive, would be nearly two years older than Flora."

"Is she dead?" asked Flora.

"I do not know. I took up my abode among the Indians, and cared for her tenderly, until she was five years old, when she disappeared, and I was never able to find the least trace of her. My love for her had become so strong, that my vengeance was turned against myself. I have risen to be a chief of the Crows, and am thoroughly an Indian. If Martin Laurie is inclined to dispute my identity, there are old trappers in the mountains who can prove that I am William Robinette."

The Scotchman, relying on the assistance of the employés of the post, would have resisted the authority of Flora and her uncle; but Bad Eye was backed by a strong force of warriors, and he submitted with as good a grace as he could assume. His submission did not come soon enough to save his position. Flora Robinette turned over the management of her business to George Benning, and Laurie and Farnsworth soon left for the East.

It was not long before Benning and Flora followed them, with a sufficient escort of mountain-men; Fred Wilder having become so far convalescent as to be able to take charge of the business at the rendezvous. Bad Eye accompanied them some distance on their journey; but they in vain endeavored to persuade him to return to civilized life.

"I am no longer a white man," he said. "I love the Crows, and the remainder of my life shall be spent among them."

At St. Louis the young couple were married, the provisions of Paul Robinette's will were fairly complied with, and his gray scalp, after being subjected to such severe vicissitudes, found a quiet resting-place in consecrated ground.

White Shield remained with Silverspur at the rendezvous, feeling that he had nowhere else to go.

"I have left the Blackfeet," he said, "I have betrayed the Arapahoes, and I have no people."

"Am I not your people, my brother?" asked Silver spur.

The Blackfoot was content to stay with his friend, although he was not satisfied at the rendezvous. Neither was Silver spur satisfied; for he could not forget Dove-eye.

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